PRICE 5 CENTS

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

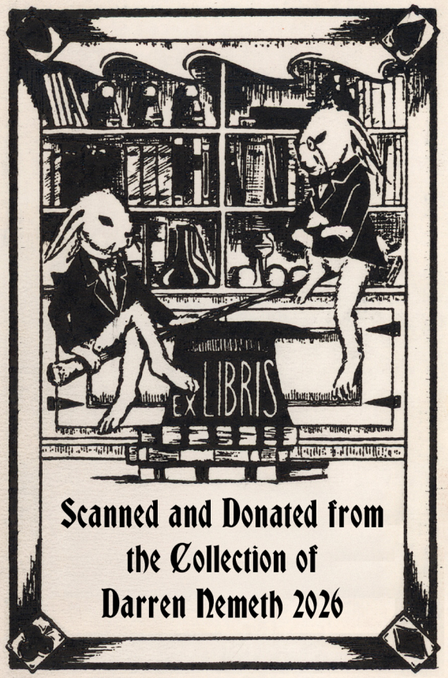
No. 140

Price 5 cents

The WOMAN of MYSTERY
THE TRAIN SUDDENLY STARTED UP AND THE SECRET SERVICE OFFICER REALIZED THAT HE HAD BEEN TRICKED BY THE QUEEN OF THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS.

THE
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
COMPANY
CLEVELAND
U. S. A.

by
"OLD SLEUTH"



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OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

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No. 140 | THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A. Published Weekly. By Subscription, $2.50 per year; $1.25 for 6 months. | VOL. III

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THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY

OR

THE ROUND-UP OF THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS

BY OLD SLEUTH

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

MARIE SIRSTOFF—Queen of Diamond Smugglers who poses as a Countess persecuted by Russian spies because she will not become the morgantic wife of a Russian Grand Duke. For years she has eluded the secret service agents of the United States by devising a most remarkable method for bringing diamonds into the country without paying duty on them.

JAMES ARTHUR—Captain of the band of smugglers who poses as an investment broker in New York.

BRASS KNUCKLES, STILETTO, BILL THE BRUISER, MIKE THE DIP, SYLVIA—Members of the band of smugglers.

HUMPHREY DEFORREST—Wealthy banker who has loaned money to the supposed Countess.

LUCILLE DEFORREST—Wife of the banker who has arranged to buy a necklace from the Countess, believing it to be an heirloom of the Sirstoff family instead of a set of smuggled diamonds. Is interested in the Countess' story and willing to help her with money and influence.

BRONSON—Superintendent of the Chester Building.

JENKS—Secret service agent who is fooled by the Queen of Diamond Smugglers.

DIGGER BARRY—Famous mystery-solver who is called into the smuggling case by the head of the secret service in New York. At first is tricked by Arthur but by the exertion of his remarkable powers of deduction discovers the method used by the smugglers to bring the diamonds into the United States and by an exhibition of intrepidity succeeds in rounding up the gang.

TOBY, YANK—Barry's assistants.

SECRET SERVICE AGENTS, POLICE, TRAINMEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN OF THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS.

"Madam, kindly accompany me to the matron's room of the Customs Office!"

These startling words caused the woman to whom they were addressed to arouse from a seeming reverie.

Glancing hastily from her window in a parlor car attached to the New-York-Montreal express to the station where the words "Rouse's Point" were plainly visible above the door, she raised her lorgnettes and turned toward the speaker with haughtiness.

Her face, beautiful beyond the ordinary, was pallid, its effect being enhanced by a simple and severe gown of black, while her poise and delicately chiselled features bespoke the aristocrat.

Whether she were twenty or fifty, the customs officer who had uttered the peremptory command was unable to decide—for her hair was of no assistance to him in his endeavor to determine her age, being of a shimmering chestnut hue.

"You wish to search *me?*" the woman in black exclaimed, still keeping her lorgnettes focused upon the inspector. "What, pray, do you expect to find?"

"Diamonds, madam! Twenty thousand dollars' worth of uncut diamonds!"

"Then you accuse me of being a smuggler?"

Both the words and the tone in which they were uttered caused the other occupants of the parlor car to turn their attention toward the beauty in black and the inspector.

"I accuse you of nothing, madam. I simply ask you to accompany me to the matron's room because your description tallies with that of the woman to whom the diamonds were handed on the steamship when it arrived in Montreal."

"Diamonds handed to *me?*" repeated the woman in black. "Preposterous! I should think if you suspected me of smuggling that you would examine my trunks before annoying me!"

"We have already done so, madam," replied the customs official, with ever so faint a smile.

"And so, not finding any diamonds as you expected, instead of believing your information wrong, you come into this car filled with people and publicly insult me by ordering me to subject myself to search? It is an outrage! If there is any way in which you can be made to pay for this insult, I shall——"

"Words will not dissuade me from my duty, madam. I am acting under orders. You are only delaying the train," interrupted the inspector. "I dislike to use force *but*—" and the official's pause was significant.

An instant longer the woman in black gazed through her lorgnettes at the inspector—then, abandoning her attitude of injured innocence, she turned to her fellow passengers.

"Is there no *man* in this car who will protect a helpless woman from such an outrage?" she stammered, her voice trembling and tearful.

Immediately, three or four men sprang to their feet.

"I warn you not to interfere with a customs officer of the United States in the performance of his duties!" hastily exclaimed the inspector, whom the woman's actions and appeal only made the more certain that she had the diamonds in her possession. "This woman has been closely traced. She is only acting now, trying to win your sympathies! She——"

"Sir!" protested the beauty, then buried her face in the back of her chair and sobbed bitterly.

Moved by the refined appearance of the woman in black and her evident suffering at the disgrace of being suspected of smuggling, several of the men moved toward the official.

"Have a care, inspector!" exclaimed one of them. "You are making serious charges! It is entirely possible your information is incorrect—the customs office has made mistakes before, you know!"

This statement aroused a murmur of approval from the other occupants of the car, to whom it seemed incredible that the beautiful creature, so pathetic in her helplessness, could be concerned in an attempt to smuggle diamonds.

But the exhibition of hostility to himself only made the official the more determined.

"If the woman is not carrying the diamonds on her person, why does she object to being searched, inasmuch as we know that they were handed to a woman answering her description in all respects?" **he demanded, gruffly.**

Before this argument, the sympathizers of the beauty in black were silent.

Noting this, the woman hurriedly exclaimed:

"It is not to being searched that I object—it is the disgrace, the public disgrace. *I know no diamonds will be found on me!*" Then, turning upon the inspector, she said with the greatest hauteur: "I will go with you—but you will regret your act! I have powerful friends and I will see if an unprotected woman cannot travel from Canada to the United States without being subjected to public insult!"

And, rising from her chair, the beauty in black made her way down the aisle of the car, outraged dignity apparent in every line and move of her lithe body, while a few steps behind her the inspector followed, carrying her long coat and handbag.

No sooner had the door of the matron's room in the customs office closed upon the suspect, however, than the inspector who had brought her in turned to his chief:

"Sure there hasn't been any mistake made?" he demanded, savagely, for the looks cast upon him in the parlor car and the words he had heard as he followed the beauty had ruffled him. "Read me that description of the woman I was to get, again."

After learning the cause of his subordinate's anger, the chief picked up a piece of paper and read:

"Woman very beautiful. Face very pale, Hair, chestnut. Dresses in black, Plays the aristocrat."

"That's the woman!" declared the inspector with a mighty sigh of relief. "She sure does play the aristocrat all right, all right. She came pretty near having me going. I don't wonder she has never been caught before. I should as soon suspect the Queen of England."

"It'll be a big thing for this office, Jenks, and for you, too, to have landed her!" chuckled the chief. "Washington has been on the trail of these smugglers for three years, followed them practically over all the world and now we've——"

But the official's words were interrupted by the opening of the door from the matron's room and the appearance of the woman in black and the matron.

"I didn't find a thing!" announced the latter, in tones ludicrously crestfallen.

"What?" exclaimed the chief, more to cover his

disappointment than because he had not heard the statement.

"I said I could find no diamonds," repeated the matron.

In amazement, the two officials looked at one another until the silence was broken by the icy tones of the suspect:

"I presume now that you have searched me and subjected me to such disgrace that I may return to my car?"

And without waiting for any reply, the beauty in black swept from the customs office and was soon back in her seat where, after announcing the fact of her innocence, she declined all advances of companionship and immersed herself in a magazine.

But could the custom officials have read her mind, they would have found her saying mentally:

"It will take more than a customs inspector to catch Marie Sirstoff, the Queen of Diamond Smugglers!"

CHAPTER II.

A BOLD MOVE.

The departure of the woman in black from the customs office galvanized the dumbfounded officials into action.

"Jenks, a woman may make up into all sorts of appearances *but the one you brought in to be searched was natural!* I've had too much experience with women not to know. She answers to the description sent us—and there never were two women alike! Some way or other, the beauty has tricked us—how, it's up to us to find out! You jump on that train and don't you let her give you the slip. If she tries to leave the train—or rather, if she does leave the train and goes to any hotel, you follow her and wire for instructions. But be careful you don't let her get a glimpse of you or you'll give the whole thing away by putting her on her guard—and we want her to think that we were satisfied with the matron's examination. I'll wire New York and the chief can do what he thinks best. Remember, we want the credit of rounding-up these diamond smugglers to come to this office. If anything develops on the trip, wire New York. Good Luck!"

The last words were shouted at the inspector for the train was already in motion and the official had dashed out that he might get onto one of the forward cars in order that the woman he was to shadow might not see him.

Taking his seat in the car just ahead of the one in which the suspect was riding, Jenks, who was known to all the employees of the railroad that travelled the international route, called the newsboy to him when he came through the coach.

After describing the beauty to him, he ordered him to pass through the parlor car frequently and watch what she was doing.

Proud to think that he had been selected as an aid to the secret service of the United States, the boy made many trips into the parlor car, only to report that the woman in black was reading or sleeping or looking out of the window.

But just before the train arrived at Plattsburg—where it always stopped to allow the passengers to get lunch—the newsboy rushed in, exclaiming breathlessly:

"She's writing on a telegraph blank!"

Expressing his delight at the information by a good-sized tip, the inspector rose from his seat and made his way rapidly through the train until he came to the baggage car, where he stood upon the platform waiting for the coaches to slow down. Then he jumped off and ran for the telegraph office.

The exchange of greetings between the customs official and the operator was brief.

"There's a woman in black who'll be along here in a minute to send a message. I want a copy of it!"

"Why not take my eye shade and pretend that you're the operator?" suggested the telegrapher.

"She'd know me in a minute! I'll just stay back here out of sight at your desk."

But despite his precautions, the woman was aware that the inspector was travelling with her.

Just before he had jumped off, the beauty had looked from her window—and had seen the customs official, who had ordered her searched, as he dashed into the station.

Under her apparent calm, the ordeal to which she had been subjected had shaken the woman in black deeply and her seeming sleep or absorption in magazines were merely pretenses in order that she might think without appearing to—for she wished to let her confederates in New York know the danger in which they all were. And with a cunning that made her the dangerous creature the secret service agents had found her, instead of sending the message in code form, she had written it out in full, just as though she were the injured person she had claimed to be.

For an instant, as the beauty caught sight of the inspector, a smile played about her mouth then, hastily taking her pencil from her handbag, she erased the signature to the message she had written and substituted another.

But only for a moment did the woman in black allow the fact that she was being shadowed by a customs official to produce any outward effect upon her!

As the cars stopped, she leisurely gathered up her handbag and telegram, left the car, entered the station,

approached the window of the telegraph office and in the suavest manner requested that her message be rushed, paid for it and returned to her car.

Yet scarcely had she left the station than Jenks had the telegraph blank in his hands and was reading:

"JAMES ARTHUR, Esq.
411 Chester Building
New York City:

"Have been searched for smuggled diamonds. Insulted publicly. Perfect outrage. Want you to take the matter up with Washington.

"DELIA R. T."

As the inspector read the words referring to the report of the matter to the national capitol, his jaw dropped.

"Anything wrong?" asked the operator, solicitously.

"Can't tell yet—but this sure looks like it," returned Jenks, listlessly. "I'll make a copy of that wire and send it to the chief in New York and then you can put it through." And rapidly the inspector wrote a message to the division chief, embodying the telegram from the suspect, then went out and boarded the train, learning from his spy that the suspect was in her seat in the parlor car.

But the inspector was in no happy mood!

The telegram the woman had sent had made him very uncomfortable. True, he could defend himself by saying that he had acted under orders and in accordance with the description of the smuggler furnished the customs office at Rouse's Point. Yet he knew all too well that agents were expected to use discretion—and he felt that he could not plead appearances, in consideration of the protestation of her innocence the woman in black had made.

The more the official thought of the case, the more heartily he wished that he were out of it and he was contemplating wiring to his chief at the boundary between the two countries for orders to return when he was thrown into further discomfiture by his spy.

"De peach wants youse to come into her car and talk with her!" whispered the newsboy in the inspector's ear.

CHAPTER III.

"DIGGER" BARRY.

The receipt of the report from the customs office at Rouse's Point that the inspectors had not found the diamonds upon the suspected smuggler threw the chief of the secret service in New York into a fury and he paced up and down his room excitedly.

"Tricked again!" he snapped. "This thing is getting on my nerves! Here for three years we have been chasing this band of diamond smugglers from one end of the world to the other and not only are we in ignorance of the exact members of their gang *but we haven't been able to round-up one of them when we know a package of diamonds was handed to her and kept her under surveillance every minute until she reached United States territory!* But I'll show them! I'll let them know that they can't play with Uncle Sam's secret service men—if I have to put every member of my force on their trail!"

As the first paroxysm of rage died away, however, the division chief returned to his chair, threw the discomfiting despatch on his desk and thrumbed idly on the walnut top for several minutes.

All at once, his face lighted.

"I have it," he exclaimed. "This gang's been able to give us the slip because they know all our agents! But I'll make them sit up and take notice. *I'll put Digger Barry on their trail!*"

Being a man of action, no sooner had the division chief made up his mind to call in outside aid in running the diamond smugglers to earth than he banged his hand on his bell, saying to the clerk who answered:

"Send for Digger Barry! On the jump, now!"

"Has he a 'phone?" inquired the luckless clerk.

"No, you bonehead! If he had, do you suppose I'd ask you to send for him?"

The question was asked of blank walls, however, for the clerk, in order to make up for his blunder by his alacrity in summoning the Digger, had rushed from the private office of the chief and noting the fact, the agent continued to himself: "I must try once more to persuade Barry to put in a telephone. It would save me a lot of wear and tear—though I doubt if that phase of the matter would appeal to him. Indeed, I shall call myself lucky if he consents to come down here at all."

And in contemplation of the whims of the man he had summoned, the secret service agent became silent.

Possessed of an ample fortune, Barry took the keenest delight in solving seemingly unfathomable mysteries. Indeed, it was his bull-dog tenacity in sticking to a case until he had unravelled it that had earned him his nickname of "Digger." But it was one of his caprices that he would never take up a case unless every one else had given it up.

In appearance, Digger was almost as queer as he was whimsical. Of medium height and slim, he was, however, possessed of enormous strength. From long practice, he had acquired such mastery over the muscles of his face that he could change his expression instantly, seemingly giving himself an entirely new set of features, a faculty that made it possible for him to meet a person one minute, leave him, change the angle of his hat, adopt a different facial expression and greet the same person again—without being recognized one time out of an hundred.

Fate, however, was kind to the distressed chief of the secret service and before the clerk who had been sent to summor Barry returned, the man himself appeared.

"Is it really you, Digger?" exclaimed the agent, grasping his strange friend by the hand. "I didn't know whether you would come down or not without my calling on you in person."

At this reference to his independence, the Digger scowled, saying rather testily:

"What's happened that *your* service needs my help?"

"Take this cigar and that chair and make yourself comfortable. It's a long story."

Obeying, the detective waited for the chief to begin and then listened as he told how the secret service agents abroad had tipped off the customs officers in the United States three years before, that diamonds to the value of $50,000 had been purchased by persons who claimed to live in New York.

"But Digger, though I hate to say it, we've never been able even to find the people who brought those diamonds into this country!" confessed the chief. "And what's more, they've purchased and brought to the United States some $130,000 worth of diamonds during these three years!"

"Surprising, very," commented Digger. "For what is the case in hand? How much are the gems worth that they are either going to bring in soon or have just brought in?"

"How do you know they are trying to do such a thing?" demanded the chief, in wonder.

"Because you wouldn't send for me to work on a smuggling case that was three years old—you never could produce evidence that would hold ten minutes in court. I know as well as you do that smugglers must be caught in the act, or practically so."

Ere the division chief could explain the circumstances attendant upon the latest smuggling operations of the band, he was called to the outer office but before he went, he turned over to the detective all the data bearing upon the woman in black.

With comparatively little interest, Barry read the memoranda upon the purchase of the uncut stones, in Brussels, by a middle aged man, his keeping them in his possession until he arrived in Montreal where he handed them to the mysterious beauty in black in his stateroom; the reports of the movements of this woman while she remained in the Canadian city, the contents of her trunks and finally the message from the agent at Rouse's Point saying that the diamonds had not been found on her person.

"What do you make of it, Digger?" asked the chief, rejoining the detective.

"They're mighty clever people—I should say exceedingly clever people."

"Too clever for Digger Barry?"

"Then your service gives them up? You know my terms."

"If we must, we must—I suppose," sighed the agent. "I'll keep hands off until you have had your try."

"How long will you give me?"

"Six months be long enough?"

"Plenty. I'll let you know if I make any progress. So long."

But before the detective had left the secret service agent's private office, the telegram from Jenks was handed to the chief.

Eagerly the two men read it.

"That helps some," grinned the agent. "We'll mighty soon have a line on this James Arthur. But I do wish the woman had signed her full name. Delia R. T. is certainly indefinite."

Digger, however, had been closely studying the message while the chief was speaking for he had been attracted by the unusual form of signature and as his friend ceased, he cried:

"By Jove! chief, that woman is some cunning! Just put that signature down backwards and see what you get!"

Instantly the secret service agent obeyed and, picking up his pencil wrote:

"T. R. ailed."

"That spells 'trailed'!" he shouted, excitedly. "What do you suppose it means?"

"Simply that she's wise to the fact that Jenks is on the train with her, that she anticipated any message she might send being read and took that mighty clever way of letting Mr. James Arthur know that she was being shadowed!

"Yes, I'll sure take this case! It will be some sport matching wits against a woman as crafty as this one. As I said before, I'll keep you in touch with any developments. So long!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SMUGGLERS MAKE AN AMAZING MOVE.

Scarcely had the Digger left the office of the division chief of the secret service than he was back again.

"A development so soon?" grinned the agent, as he recognized the great detective.

"Hardly, though there probably would have been if I hadn't come back—and a kind of development we don't want. I came to warn you against sending any of your men up to see Mr. James Arthur."

"Why not, man?" demanded the agent, in surprise. "It seems to me that he is the very person we must see—and without delay. It's my opinion, Digger, that he's the key to this whole diamond smuggling business."

"Evidently it is a very fortunate thing that I returned to warn you," smiled the great mystery-solver. "*It's the woman on the train who is the key to the smugglers*—not this James Arthur!"

"Then why not wire Jenks to arrest her at once!"

"After she has been searched once and nothing found on her! Why, you haven't a particle of evidence against her, man. Such a move would simply spoil the whole game when, while by using a little discretion we may be able to round-up the entire gang."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Let her land in the city—*and then hang to her trail until the mystery of the diamond smuggling has been solved*!"

"But suppose she really is the innocent she pretends to be?"

"Her signature to the telegram precludes that. This man James Arthur is merely a confederate. By not sending anyone up to interview him, he will be sorely puzzled—for he will have sense enough to know that her wire has been copied by some member of the secret service."

"And by not getting a line on him, we may lose some all-important clue," interupted the chief.

"Just because I asked you not to have any of your men interview the fellow doesn't mean that I intend to let him get out of my sight. I shall either trail him myself, or have Toby and Yank, my assistants. There's a vast difference between shadowing and interviewing, chief."

"I know you're a wonder, Digger, but how in the world do you expect to trail any one when you haven't seen them—or do you happen to know this James Arthur from past experience?"

"Don't know him any more than you do. As to how I intend to shadow him, that's my business, if you'll pardon my putting it that way. My idea is this: We must do everything in our power to restore the confidence of the woman in herself. I want her to get the impression that you are satisfied with the result of the search at Rouse's Point. Therefore, it is imperative that nothing be done which might alarm Arthur. In order the better to carry this out, I want you to wire Jenks to leave the train at Albany. The Montreal Express isn't due there until about seven and by hustling, I can get a train which will get me up there before that time. After she thinks she is cleared from suspicion will be the time when she needs watching!"

"By George! I believe you are right, Digger!" announced the chief, enthusiastically. "I'll wire at once. Any suggestion as to what I shall say?"

"Yes. Better say 'Barking up the wrong tree. Leave train at Albany. Return to Rouse's Point for instructions.' Then you will have time enough to send a letter to your agent in charge at the boundary, explaining what is going on, and he'll receive it in the morning."

"I'll send it immediately," exclaimed the chief, reaching for his bell to summon a clerk.

"Which is just what you mustn't do," hastily interposed the famous detective. "Arrange to have the message delivered just the moment the train arrives at Albany. If Jenks receives it before then, the woman may smell a rat. And now I must be off. I've a lot to do before I take my train.

"If anything should happen, such as the woman's leaving the train, send word to the information bureau at the station. I know the attendants there, or wire me on the train."

"All right. Good luck. Sometime I hope you will tell me how you shadow people you don't see beforehand."

"I will," chuckled the famous mystery-solver. And once more he left the office of the division chief of the secret service.

What seemed so very remarkable to the agent, was, however, very simple.

As a part of his profession, Digger had made it a point to become acquainted with the superintendents of all the important office buildings in the city, making it well worth their while to meet the renters of offices and thus learn what they looked like.

Consequently, in order to get a line on James Arthur, without in any way arousing his suspicions, it was only necessary for the great detective to go to his friend the superintendent of the Chester building.

Before doing so, however, Digger went into a District Messenger office and sent a note to his man Toby, ordering him to bring Yank and meet the famous mystery-solver at the office of the Chester building.

But when he arrived at the rendezvous, Digger received a shock!

As he entered the superintendent's office, he noticed a handsome, middle aged man seated beside the desk, conversing with his friend.

Turning at the opening of the door, the office man exclaimed, excitedly:

"Well, this is luck! Here's Mr. Barry now! Mr. Barry, I want you to shake hands with Mr. James Arthur! Mr. Arthur is a tenant in my building and just dropped in a few moments ago to ask me if I could recommend to him some skillful investigator and I immediately thought of you. Indeed, I hadn't any more than given him your address when in you came. Isn't it remarkable?"

And the superintendent beamed from one man to the other in the greatest complacency.

Barry, as can be imagined, was not enthusiastic. Indeed, he felt for the moment like choking the official who had so interfered with his plans. But such a course being out of the question, he contented himself with replying:

"Very singular." And then turning to the suspected confederate of the smugglers, he asked:

"What was the case upon which you wished to consult me, Mr.—er——"

"Arthur, James Arthur," hastily interposed the superintendent.

"I'm sorry I didn't make more of an impression upon the famous Mr. Digger Barry," smiled the smuggler suspect, with just the suggestion of sarcasm in his tone. "But I suppose you have so many things to think of that you can't be bothered with names of mere nobodies."

"I'll get even with you for that, my fine fellow!" snapped the detective to himself while aloud he said: "I'm a bit hard of hearing, so you must excuse my blunder. Again, may I ask you upon what it is that you wish to consult me?"

"Will you take the case?" countered Arthur.

"Isn't that a bit like asking a man to buy a pig in a poke? There are many cases that I not only *do* not but *would* not touch. I presume if I hadn't come in just when I did, my friend Bronson, here, would have told you that I am considered a crank by those who know me."

"Oh, I told him that!" laughed the superintendent, little realizing the duel of wits that was being enacted before his eyes.

"That being the case, Mr. James, there is no reason why I should have any hesitancy in insisting upon my usual custom of having the matter set before me ere I can tell whether I shall decline to serve you or not."

The tones in which the Digger spoke were more than cold and he expected that they would have the result of making the suspected smuggler not only refuse to divulge his business but take his departure as well.

But the great detective was destined to another surprise—even greater than the first!

"I like frankness and candor," smiled Arthur. "I wish to consult you about the recovery of some diamonds which were stolen from my dead brother. The case is so baffling that I am sure it will interest you. If you will come up to my office with me, I shall be pleased to go into the matter with you in detail!"

CHAPTER V.

ARTHUR SCORES AGAIN.

Accustomed as he was to surprise, it required all of the great detective's self-control to keep from showing his amazement at the statement of the very man he suspected of belonging to a band of diamond smugglers.

Intently he searched the fellow's face with his piercing eyes, in the hope that by the tremor of an eyelash or a heightening of color, under his penetrating gaze, the man would betray himself. But Arthur's face was as inscrutable as his own.

When he had first entered the room and received the cordial greeting of the well-meaning superintendent, Digger had thought he noted a look of amused contempt in the suspected smuggler's eyes. Yet so transitory had the effect been that he could not be sure.

But the boldness with which Arthur returned his gaze after mentioning the lost diamonds left no doubt in the detective's mind that the fellow was taking mental stock of him—and whether or not he had learned in some manner of his visit to the chief of the secret service's office and was merely baiting him in the hope of luring him into the power of the smuggling band, Digger determined to show his utter lack of fear.

"H'm, that certainly sounds like an interesting case," he murmured, as though thinking aloud, "Diamond thefts, especially when they are cleverly turned, have always interested me. It's because I'm so fond of the beauties, I suppose. If you can assure me that the stealing of your dead brother's diamonds was a clever piece of work, I will take your case, Mr. Arthur."

And as the great detective spoke, he again focussed his piercing eyes upon the fellow.

"What strikes me as being clever may not seem so to one of your wonderful mystery-solving powers, Mr. Barry," smiled Arthur. "To me, the case is absolutely baffling. How it will strike you can only be told after you have heard what I can tell you, which I shall only do in my office."

Again there was a momentary tension as each man strove to read what was passing in the other's mind—but this time there was no mistaking the defiant hostility that shone in Arthur's eyes.

Convinced that the story was but a ruse to lure him into some trap, Digger smiled blandly.

"I shall be very glad to hear the case, Mr. Arthur—in half an hour," he replied. "If that will be agreeable to you, I will go to your office at the expiration of that time."

"That will do admirably as it will allow me to attend to one or two important matters," returned the suspected smuggler. "The entrance to my suite of offi-

ces is at No. 407 but as I do not care to have any one know of your presence, I should be obliged if you would knock at the door of 411, my private room."

And thanking the superintendent for his kindness, Arthur took his departure.

"That will mean a good, fat fee for you, Mr. Barry," exclaimed Bronson, as soon as the door had closed. "Mr. Arthur doesn't mind spending money for a good turn—as I know well. And it surely seems a good omen of your success that you should have come in just as I was talking about you."

But the famous detective was in no pleasant frame of mind. Instead of his being able to work on the smuggling case without Arthur or any of the rest of his gang knowing it, he had practically played into their hands. Yet Digger was not a man to be dismayed by seeming odds against him and gritting his teeth, he vowed to himself that he would outwit the smugglers and beat them at their own game.

"What do you know about this man Arthur?" he demanded of the superintendent, with a suddenness that startled him.

"What do I know about him?" repeated Bronson. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what's his business? How long has he been in the building? What services have you rendered him that he has tipped you?"

"Ah, I see. Want to get a line on him, eh, so you won't have to ask him so many questions," chuckled the superintendent adding with a knowing wink, "prices according to whether he's a churchman or a good fellow, eh?"

Inwardly cursing his friend's garrulity, the detective replied:

"Right, as usual, Bronson. I've always told you that a man as clever as you in reading human nature should not smother his ability the way you are doing. But you haven't answered my questions."

Accepting the words as sincere, the superintendent gave a satisfied smirk.

"James Arthur has been in this building just two weeks. He has a force of three clerks and four stenographers and he's in the investment business. As to the favors I've done him, while of course it's nobody's business, I don't mind telling *you* it was for taking him up and down the freight elevator after hours."

"H'm. It must have been a good tip that would induce you to stay up late, especially in this building," exclaimed the detective, laughingly.

"Well, Josiah Bronson never was a man to let twenty-five dollars go begging when all needed was to make two trips on the freight elevator, one at eleven o'clock and the other at three."

"I don't blame you. But why did you use the freight elevator instead of one of the regular passenger lifts?"

"Had to take a trunk up and down."

"H'm. Funny business for an investment man, having trunks come and go at such hours."

"That's what I thought, Mr. Barry. And I told Arthur so. But he said they contained some property belonging to his dead brother that he wished to keep in the vault in his offices where they'd be safe."

"I see. He's probably become nervous since the theft of the diamonds."

"You certainly are a mind reader, Mr. Barry," exclaimed the superintendent, looking at the famous detective with awe. "That's the very reason Mr. Arthur gave when I asked him."

"Were the trunks heavy?" continued Digger, ignoring the compliment.

"Fairly. But he had two men to carry them."

"When was the last time you performed this service, Bronson?"

"Last night. But Mr. Arthur didn't take the trunk down, so I didn't have to wait."

"Then the thing for me to do is to examine that trunk—if it's still there," exclaimed Digger to himself. "The question is, how?" And the great detective lapsed into deep study of the problem—which he had not satisfactorily solved when Toby and Yank entered the office.

But before there was a chance for any exchange of words between Barry and his assistants, the door again opened and James Arthur stood on the threshold!

With an amused twinkle in his eyes, the man gazed at the three detectives.

"I just dropped in to tell you, Mr. Barry, that I've changed my mind about engaging you on that case. Wanted to save you the trouble of going up to my office," he exclaimed.

And with a mocking smile suffusing his face, Arthur turned on his heel and walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

DIGGER'S RUSE.

All too well did Digger realize that he had been outwitted by the very man he had intended to trail without his knowing it. No need was there to tell him that the suspected smuggler's second appearance in the office of the superintendent was for the sole purpose of obtaining a look at his two assistants—and with this knowledge came the further realization that the man had been standing watch in the corridor instead of going up to his suite.

"You may think you have put one over on Digger Barry, James Arthur, but I'll show you that he knows a trick or two!" he hissed, vindictively, and springing to his feet, the detective seized Bronson's telephone and called for the chief of the secret service.

"Hello, chief," he exclaimed when he had been given his connection, "this is Digger. Yes, too much has happened. The smugglers know I'm on their trail and they've flushed my game! Never mind now, time's too precious. I want you to come right up to the Chester building with four of your men. Get a warrant for the fraudulent use of the mails. What? Yes, have it blank. Yes, it's Arthur I propose to haul to jail—but there may be others. How long will it take you to get up here? Twenty minutes? Good. Keep your eyes open for I'm convinced that your office is being closely watched. I'll meet you in the lobby of the building. Instruct your men to follow you and to enter Arthur's office at room 407 and then hold all the people in the room, taking possession of the telephone instruments. Hurry, now!"

In amazement, the superintendent of the building listened to the one-sided conversation.

"You don't mean to say there is anything wrong with Mr. Arthur, do you, Mr. Barry?" he asked excitedly.

"Sounded like it, didn't it?" returned the mystery-solver, tersely. "But don't interrupt me with any more questions, please. Now, you two, I want to know if you have seen anyone hanging around my house this morning?" And the detective turned upon his assistants.

In appearance, the men were as remarkable as their master. Toby was tall and thin, with the face of an imbecile, while Yank seemed scarcely more than a child. But both of them had proved their cleverness many times before and both were—like their leader—possessed of superhuman strength.

"There was only a man from the gas company to fix the chandelier in your den," replied Toby. "He came about ten minutes after you had gone."

"But there was nothing wrong with my chandelier!" declared Digger. "You fellows have been fooled—and by that ancient and bewhiskered trick of the gas man. I suppose he was there when you received my note?"

"Yes, but he left just afterwards," replied Yank.

"And I'll wager went directly to the nearest telephone and called up the office of James Arthur," added the detective, drily. "But though I'm disappointed, I can't blame you—I've been tricked by the very same gang myself, this morning. However, we've got to show our metal by proving that cunning as they are, we're a little bit more so!"

And briefly Digger described the case to his chagrined assistants, ending with instructions for them to station themselves on the fourth floor of the building and to trail any one who left the offices of the supposed investment broker after Digger and the secret service men entered, then went out into the corridor and descended to the lobby where he was joined almost immediately by the division chief and his men.

No sooner had they met, however, than the detective noticed a man rush toward an elevator that was just ready to ascend.

Believing the fellow to be a spy for the suspected smuggler who had been left on guard to watch his moments, Digger was determined that no word should be taken to the offices on the fourth floor that he had been joined by the secret service agent, if he could prevent it.

The distance from where he stood to the elevator was too great for the detective to cover it in time to intercept the shadow, however. But the great detective was irritated by the completeness of the suspected smuggler's system of espionage and every cell of his resourceful brain was on the alert.

Suddenly clapping his hand to his coat pocket, Digger yelled:

"Stop thief! Stop thief! I've been robbed! That's the man trying to get into that elevator now! Shut the door!"

At the same time that he uttered the startling cry, the detective leaped forward, closely followed by the secret service chief.

The words had electrified all who happened to be in the lobby and in an excited, struggling mass they surged toward the elevators, effectually blocking the attempt of the detective to reach the spy.

But Digger's ruse had succeeded—for the elevator man had shut the door in the fellow's face!

"Good work! But what does it mean?" demanded the chief.

"Simply that that fellow was going up to warn Arthur that we were together," returned the famous mystery-solver.

"What are you going to do with him? Arrest him?"

"No. I've blocked his game and that's enough! Just come into this elevator here and we'll let the shadow get out of it as best he can."

And seizing the agent by the arm, Digger hurried him into a waiting lift and was soon on the fourth floor where they were quickly joined by Toby, Yank and the men the chief had brought with him; for during the excitement, these assistants had kept their eyes on their leaders and when they saw them disappear within an elevator, they realized that the alarm had been a trick and followed them in the next car.

The suite occupied by the suspected smuggler was at the end of the corridor and when the band of raiders was almost at the door, the detective paused.

"Toby, you and Yank will wait out in the hall, as I told you, to trail any one who comes out of Arthur's office. You other men will enter the main office and ask for Mr. Arthur. Then one of you will stand near the door, another take charge of the telephones and

you other two will take care of any men in the room. You'd better have your guns handy for the clerks will probably give you a fight.

"Whichever of you stands guard at the door remember to let one man out, if he tries to make a getaway. My boys out here will follow him. But don't let more than one get by! Already? Then come on!"

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED.

Rapidly the detective and secret service agents advanced down the corridor, Toby and Yank taking up positions near the elevator shafts, and when Digger arrived at the door numbered 411 he gave the signal for the others to enter at 407 while he strove to open the door to the suspected smuggler's private office with a service key he had obtained from the superintendent.

But try as he would, he could not budge the lock with the key!

"Reckon we're on the right track, chief, when Arthur takes the trouble to change the lock on his door," muttered the detective, at the same time producing his pick-lock from his pocket.

Yet he achieved no better success with that than he had with the service key!

"First time in my life I ever found a lock that I couldn't pick!" growled the famous mystery-solver.

"Why not give it up and follow the others into the main office?" queried the agent.

"And let Arthur slip out this way and through our fingers? Not much! Just brace your shoulder against this door while I try my chisel."

Quickly the chief obeyed—but just as he placed his shoulder against the oaken panels, the door opened!

Unable to catch their balance, the two manhunters stumbled into the room—and before they could recover themselves, they were gazing into the muzzles of two revolvers!

With a mocking smile, James Arthur stared at them.

"From what I had heard of you, Digger, I never supposed you were so crude in your methods," he sneered. "Of course, I'm not surprised at the chief. Everybody knows what boneheads the secret service men are. But I'm really disappointed in you, Digger. I had hoped to find a foeman worthy of my metal. Yet it is probably just as well that you should come into my power easily. Saves me a lot of trouble."

Almost beside himself with rage at the contemptuous reference to himself and his agents, the chief shouted:

"Have a care, James Arthur! In my pocket I have a warrant for your arrest—and mark my word you'll be made to suffer for this high-handed treatment of an officer of the United States government!"

"As a matter of friendly advice, chief, permit me to say that if you and your men didn't put so much faith in the power of the government and showed a little more common sense, there wouldn't be so much counterfeiting and smuggling going on. But I see that I am distressing you. If you have a warrant, why don't you serve it?"

The answer of the secret service agent, however, was a shout to his men in the adjoining room.

But for all the response he received, he might as well have been calling for aid at the North Pole!

"Now don't get excited, chief," mocked Arthur. "Take pattern from your clever friend, Digger. See how quietly he submits to the inevitable? That door leading into my outer offices is re-enforced with steel, so that it would require your men to work several hours before they could break it down.

"But I must request you not to raise any more outcries. Another sound from either of you will bring a bullet that will forever silence you! Now just stand as you are while I shut the door through which you entered."

And as he spoke, the man who had so cleverly trapped the two manhunters moved around until he could reach the door leading into the corridor and pushed it with his foot just as Toby's face appeared at the opening!

"Your man was a trifle slow, Digger," grinned Arthur. "However, it won't do for me to dally too long giving you advice. Just oblige me by walking over to that vault on the opposite side of the room. I think it would be best to lock you two up so that no one will run off with you. Step lively, please."

The taunts of the man they had expected to capture, but who had instead taken them prisoners, were gall and wormwood to the manhunters but when an instant's hesitation after his last command brought the pressure of cold steel against the backs of their necks, they decided it was best to obey—and like two whipped children they walked to the door of the vault.

"Now march right in like little men!" chuckled their captor, again pressing the muzzles of his revolvers against the backs of their necks.

But Digger was determined not to allow himself to be locked in the vault without a struggle—and just as he raised his foot to step into the steel chamber, he whirled with lightning rapidity, making a desperate grab for Arthur's waist!

Despite the swiftness of the movement, however, the detective failed in his object!

With a terrible kick the smuggler suspect caught Digger in the stomach, driving him into the vault where he fell to the floor, a huddled mass, while with

his right hand he clouted the secret service chief over the head, pushed him through the steel door, then shut it with a bang!

A moment, the captor of the two manhunters stood before the closed door of the vault and gloated.

"So Digger Barry would pit himself against the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers and her band, would he?" he chuckled. "I'll admit he's the most dangerous man who could have taken up our trail and if we hadn't been watching the office of the secret service chief we might not have learned that he had taken up the smuggling case until too late. As it is, however, before he is rescued, both Marie and I will be safe on our way to 'Frisco."

Loud voices and the sound of effort to force the door coming from his main office called the smuggler to his danger.

Quickly picking up his tall hat and donning his gloves, the false investment broker went to the window of his private office, which opened onto a court, raised the sash, crawled out onto the coping and made his way to another window which he raised and passed through, coming out onto the landing of the stairway, whence it was no task at all for him to descend to the third floor, take the elevator, go down to the lobby and out onto the street where he quickly hailed a taxicab and drove away.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOBY PROVES HIS WORTH.

While the contemplated raid upon the private office of the smuggler suspect had turned out so disastrously for the men conducting it, their assistants had carried out their instructions without a hitch.

The first secret service agent to enter had quietly told the occupants of the main room that they were under arrest and though the three men who were in the office offered protest, they made no fight when the agents drew their revolvers.

Indeed, it seemed to the officers that the very scene must have been rehearsed many times, so quietly did the employes take the matter.

And such was practically the truth—for unknown to the secret service agents, the three men and four women were all members of the smuggling band. That sooner or later they would come under suspicion, their Queen had told them—and she had carefully mapped out their actions when such time came.

"Offer no resistance," had been her orders. "While you may be suspected, the burden of proof will be upon the men who arrest you. If you keep your mouths shut, they will be unable to make any case against you and, if they should take you to court, you will be released."

The re-enforcing of the doors with steel had also been the Queen's suggestion—and the superintendent of the building, who had been so pleased to earn a few extra dollars by carrying up and down the trunks after hours, would have been dumfounded if he had entered the private office of the affable investment broker after he had delivered the trunks. For they contained the steel used in the work and the men who carried them were expert steel workers whose great strength made it possible for them to handle the trunks as though they were comparatively light.

Even the method of sudden egress from the private office by the window route had been planned, the selection of 411 having been determined by its proximity to the window which opened onto the stairs, and this window had been unlocked daily by one of the band who posed as a clerk, and more than once, in the dead of night, Arthur had made the passage from his room to the stairs.

In consequence of this preparedness, the calmness with which the raid was taken irritated the officers. But their surprise was quickly forgotten when they heard the shouts of their leader in the private room.

Leaving the agent who stood guard at the door to control the prisoners, the others threw themselves upon the door which bore the word "Private"—but their efforts to break it down were without avail.

"Somebody go down to the engine room and get axes, crowbars and sledges," cried one of the agents. "You, on the door, had better go. You can get Yank to take your place."

Quickly the man obeyed and it was because of his account of what was transpiring that Toby had sought to go to his master's aid—only to arrive a moment too late.

Yet Digger's tall assistant was not the man to leave his leader in the lurch!

A hasty examination of the door that had barred him from the room disclosed a transom over it. To reach this, by placing a foot on the knob of the door, was but the work of a moment.

But Toby was prevented from seeing what was occurring inside because of a sheet of heavy manila wrapping paper that had been pasted over it!

No easy task was it to keep his position and try to force open the transom and after a few moments' striving, Toby decided the quickest and surest way would be to break the glass. And drawing his revolver, he hurriedly beat it out, raised his head and gasped as he beheld the room deserted.

What had happened, he had no idea. He only knew that by dropping into the room he would be able to open the doors, as there were catches on each lock, and admit the agents.

With the agility of a cat, he worked himself through the transom, let himself down, ran to the door, turned the catch and threw it open!

At the first movement of the barrier which had severed them so effectually from their chief, the secret service agents, believing that Arthur, ignorant of their presence in the main room, was coming out, whirled and levelled their revolvers at the door.

But when they saw the familiar features of Toby, they shouted with delight while the members of the smuggler-band gasped in amazement!

Only for a moment, however, did the agents give way to their feelings of elation to think that Digger's assistant had managed to enter the room from which they were barred—then rushed in through the door.

"Why, where are Arthur, the chief and Barry?" exclaimed one of the officers, gazing about in dismay at the deserted office.

"Looks as though that open window explained their absence," asserted another.

Their attention thus attracted to the raised sash, the agents hastened toward it and thrust their heads out.

"There's another window open," cried the officer who had discovered the first.

"And here's a mark where the nail in a shoe scratched the varnish on the sill," excitedly announced another. "The chief and Barry must have followed Arthur by this route. But I can't understand why they didn't yell for us?"

"Because they didn't go out that way," returned Toby, quietly. "There was only one man who left by the window route and that was the man we are after, 'James Arthur.'"

"What makes you think so?" demanded the agents, in chorus.

"The reason that I saw Arthur covering Digger and your chief with his revolvers. The fellow has hidden them somewhere and then made his escape."

"Nonsense, Toby. There isn't a spot in this room where they could be concealed. They're not at the bottom of the court, therefore, they must have followed Arthur. I——"

But his words were interrupted by a shout from the other room.

"I'll put a bullet into the first person who tries to force by me!" rang out Yank's voice.

"Quick, we'll gather in those of the gang we have—that'll be better than nothing!" exclaimed Toby. And as one man the assistant and officers hastened back into the main office—and timely indeed was their arrival!

The three men and four stenographers, realizing that entrance had been gained to the private office and that Arthur had fled, evidently determined to take advantage of the absence of the agents to make their own getaways. When first they had been notified that they were under arrest, they had calmly donned their coats and hats preparatory to being taken to jail. But when they had heard the statements and exclamations from the private office, suggesting that their leader had deserted them, with one accord they had charged upon Yank.

Notwithstanding the heavy odds, however, Digger's assistant had faced them unwaveringly, shouting his warning in the hope that his fellows in the other room might hear and come to his aid before it was too late.

"Put the bracelets on them!" commanded Toby, as he ran to his chum's support.

For an instant, as the agents bore down upon them, the three men backed together as though determined to put up a fight. But the suggestive brandishing of Yank's and Toby's pistols caused them to abandon the idea and in surly silence they submitted to being handcuffed.

Occupants of the other offices on the fourth floor of the Chester building had been attracted by the shouts and the breaking of glass and the corridor was filling with excited men, office boys and stenographers when the agent who had been despatched to the engine room returned, accompanied by the superintendent and the officer attached to the building.

Briefly Toby explained to the astonished Bronson all that had happened and when he had finished, the guard picked up a telephone, called the nearest police station and requested that a patrol wagon be sent around for the prisoners.

"I warn you against sending us to a police station. You have no charge against us!" protested one of the prisoners, defiantly.

"What, isn't there any charge against these people?" demanded the building guard, looking from one secret service agent to another.

In ignorance of their chief's plans, beyond the fact that they were to participate in a raid, the officers were at a loss to know what to reply.

"See that? They can't say a word! They can make no charge against us!" exclaimed the member of the smuggling band, exultantly. "Instead of *our* being arrested, *they* should be for breaking into an office and acting in such high-handed manner! You fellows take these handcuffs off us at once or it'll be the sorriest day of your lives!"

"Now don't work yourself up, sonny," interposed Toby, calmly. "There's a mighty bad charge against you! In fact, there'll be two: suspicious characters and smuggling! Either one would hold you for a day in police court. But you're not going to one. Your crime is against the United States government—so you'll go to the county jail where we can keep you as long as we please!"

The quiet positiveness of Digger's assistant effectually put a damper on the prisoners and they made no further protest, being led away upon the arrival of the patrol wagon.

"Now to find Digger!" exclaimed Yank, as the last of the captives was escorted from the office.

CHAPTER IX.

DIGGER IS RESCUED.

As the secret service agents and Digger's two assistants, accompanied by the superintendent, entered the private office, one of the former remarked:

"The only place I can see where either Barry or the chief might be hidden is under the floor. This Arthur is such a slick proposition that he may have built a trap-door somewhere and, after rendering them unconscious, jammed them in between the floor and the ceiling of the room below."

"There's no use in hunting in out-of-the-way places until we have tried those that are at hand," returned Toby. "Bronson, does there happen to be a vault in this room?"

At the question, all eyes were focussed upon the superintendent, as the men eagerly awaited his reply.

"To be sure there is. Right over there, directly opposite the door by which we just came in though Mr. Arthur has so covered it that if I didn't know where it was, I never should have been able to find it. How he has changed this room. Seems to have entirely rearranged the woodwork. I'm surprised he didn't speak to me about it."

"Arthur isn't the man to ask outside help in any little jobs," smiled Yank.

No one made any comment upon this remark, however, for all eyes were turned upon Toby who had begun to tap the wall indicated by Bronson.

"Here it is!" he suddenly cried, bending his face close to the seemingly solid panel of oak. "I can just see the division in the boards. It certainly is a mighty clever bit of work."

"But how can we open it?" inquired one of the agents, "there isn't any handle."

"It probably works by a secret spring," returned the great detective's assistant. "But we can't waste time searching for it. It wouldn't take very long for two men to suffocate in there. Somebody give me an ax."

Quickly the implement was handed to him and, inserting one corner in the faint opening, Toby worked it for a moment and then gave the ax a twist, using all his strength.

"It's giving! It's giving!" exclaimed Bronson, excitedly.

"But it isn't giving fast enough," rejoined the assistant. "Some of the rest of you take the other axes and lend a hand."

"Why not batter the door down?" suggested one of the agents.

"Because it's steel," replied Toby. Then turning to the other two men who had inserted their implements in the crack, he asked: "Ready? One, two, three—all together!"

With might and main, the men strove to pry open the door, yet they could only start the bottom about two inches.

"You'll never get it open this way!" declared Bronson. "Let me send for a locksmith."

"We've got enough people up here as it is," returned Toby. "You fellows hold your axes steady and let me get a crow-bar in beside them." And even as he spoke, the assistant to the famous mystery-solver put his words into action.

At his command, again the men strained, there was a grinding and grating—and with a final exertion of his tremendous force, Toby snapped open the door!

With a shout, the men pressed forward only to be waved back by the tall giant.

"They need air—and badly," breathed Toby, then he entered the vaults, picked up his master and bearing him into the room, laid him down tenderly on the carpet, while one of the agents did the same for his chief.

But when the latter was brought out into the light, the men gasped in horror!

The blow from Arthur's pistol had laid open his scalp for several inches and the blood was still oozing from the wound!

At the sight of the injury, Yank hastened to the side of his chum.

"Is Digger hurt?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not that I can see," returned Toby. "Just hold his head while I pour some whiskey down his throat." And as he spoke, he drew his flask from his pocket, unscrewed the stopper, and held it to his master's lips.

Scarce breathing, the two assistants watched the effect of the powerful stimulant and after a few seconds, to their delight, they beheld a tremor run through Digger's body.

"Another draught will fetch him round all right," declared Toby. But before it could be administered, the detective opened his eyes, glanced inquiringly about him, then sat up.

"How's the chief," were his first words. And when he heard of the wound in the agent's head he crawled over to his side and examined it.

"Feels like a crushed skull," he announced. "Better send for an ambulance. Did you get Arthur?"

"No, but we got all the office force," answered Toby and hurriedly he narrated to his master how he had found him.

"Good work, boy!" the great detective exclaimed, enthusiastically. "If we don't put a crimp into James Arthur's pride from this time on, then my name isn't Digger Barry. But words won't do it. It'll require actions—and mighty strenuous ones too—in order for us to make good."

Thanks to the detective's splendid physique and the fact that he always took prime care of himself, the kick he had received from the smuggler had not injured him, as it probably would have any less well-conditioned man, and beyond a soreness he felt no ill effects. In consequence he was soon upon his feet and once more in command.

"Bronson, send for a squad of police and have them guard these offices. Have your carpenter come right up here and nail a board in that transom. Yank, go out and close the window on the stairs. Some of you go out and draw all the shades in the rooms and turn on the electric lights."

"But why not use the daylight instead of artificial?" queried the superintendent.

"Because I'm going to search these rooms from top to bottom and I don't want anyone to see what I'm doing. Arthur may take it into his head to go into one of those offices across the court and if he should catch sight of me, or any of us, ransacking his desks and papers he might be tempted to take a shot at us—and I propose to get him, not to let him get me!"

"Surely you don't think the scoundrel would dare to come back to this building again, Digger?" exclaimed Bronson.

"He's got nerve enough for anything—I'll give him credit for courage—and besides, he's in a mighty tight corner. If there are any incriminating documents here in these rooms, he'll certainly do all he can to prevent them from being found—or used against him and the gang."

To these statements of the desperateness of the smuggler, the others made no reply, showing their concurrence in them by swiftly doing all that the great detective had ordered.

But though every drawer, file and book was examined, nothing of importance was turned up, all letters and papers seeming to refer to legitimate transactions in stocks and bonds.

"It all goes to show how almighty shrewd the gang is," Digger commented, when the search ended without any evidence of the smuggling operations which he had hoped to find. "While engaged in illicit traffic in diamonds, the gang takes care to conduct a perfectly honest investment business for the purpose of establishing a good reputation. But it won't save them this time!"

"But how in the world do you suppose they sold the diamonds they smuggled?" asked one of the secret service agents.

"Can't say for certain, of course. But it would not surprise me if Arthur or some of his clerks were in the habit of going to some good customer of theirs and offering the chance to buy a stone, or several, at less than the market price, telling some cock-and-bull story as to why they were willing to make the sacrifice. You may have noticed from the correspondence that most of their customers are women—and from the names I recognized, women of wealth. If there is one thing in the world that will hypnotize a woman it is a diamond.

"But this isn't helping us to get on the trail of Arthur. It's too late for me to go to Albany, as I had intended, so I'll have to content myself with waiting for the mysterious woman in black to arrive.

"By the way, do any of you men happen to know whether or not the chief sent a telegram to be delivered to Jenks at Albany?"

"I am sure he hasn't sent any recently for he asked me to remind him to do so after we got back to the office," replied one of them.

"Good. Yank, just tell the sergeant in command of the police to come in here. You men get some bags and take all these papers down to your offices. I'll be down a little later. Keep your eyes open. I shouldn't be at all surprised if an attempt would be made to wreck your automobile that the papers might be stolen from you in the confusion."

CHAPTER X.

DIGGER RECEIVES SOME VALUABLE INFORMATION.

To the police officer who came in response to his summons, Digger gave instructions that he should post three men inside the offices and keep them there until further orders from him, placing under arrest anyone who should enter the suite by means of a key.

"I don't expect that there will be any callers, but there may——"

The detective's words were interrupted by the voice of a woman which came to him from the main office.

"Why, what has happened? What do these policemen mean here? Where is Mr. Arthur?" he heard her asked, evidently of his assistants or one of the secret service agents.

Instantly the great detective went to the door opening from the private room and the sight of the woman who was making these inquiries caused him to gasp with amazement.

She was one of the most famous society leaders in New York!

Hoping that her presence was by appointment and that in his surmise the smugglers were in the habit of disposing of the illicit diamonds to women he was correct, Digger determined to try to extract some information that might be of value from her.

"Won't you come in here, Mrs. Deforrest," he said, bowing suavely.

"But what does the presence of these officers mean? And how do you know me? I never remember to have met you?" returned the society leader.

"There has been a theft in our office which explains the presence of the police," replied Digger. "Mr. Arthur has been obliged to go to court in order to press the charge and to protect those of his office force who are innocent. In his unavoidable absence, I trust that I may serve you as well as he. Sergeant, will you kindly go out into the other room? I will confer with you again after Mrs. Deforrest has gone."

It had been on the end of Digger's tongue to say that before going to court Arthur had mentioned the fact that the society woman would call but just in time he bethought himself that perhaps her coming was unexpected and he refrained—a fact for which he was soon thankful.

Murmuring something about the difficulty of obtaining servants and employes that were honest and reliable, the society leader entered the private office after the police officer had left it, and was about to take the chair the great detective offered her when she chanced to note the glass from the transom on the floor and the axes and crow-bars in front of the door of the vault.

Fearing that the sight might arouse the woman's suspicions and thus prevent him from obtaining a clue to the methods of the band of smugglers, Digger hastened to explain the surprising condition of the office.

"For a long time we have missed a diamond or two from our vault," he lied, glibly. "Saying that he was going out, Mr. Arthur left the office, only to take a position outside his door where he could look through the transom. In a few minutes he saw one of his staff enter and begin to search through one of the drawers in his desk.

"Believing that the person was the one who was stealing the diamonds, he started to get down, slipped in some manner and in trying to save himself broke the transom. The crash of the falling glass naturally startled the employe who took refuge in the vault, necessitating its being forced."

The explanation seeming to satisfy the society leader, she sat down.

"I won't keep you long, disturbed as you must be over the unfortunate incident, but I *do* want to impress upon Mr. Arthur, through you, the importance of my having the diamond necklace by tonight. I have set my heart upon wearing it to the Rogers' ball tonight and I just dropped around to learn if he had experienced any difficulty in persuading the dear Countess Sirstoff to part with it?"

"That must be the name of the mysterious woman in black," said the great detective to himself—and then he determined upon a bold stroke.

"Mr. Arthur had a telegram from her only an hour or so ago saying that she would arrive about ten tonight—but she is very loath to part with the necklace."

"Poor dear, I don't blame her. It must be terribly harrowing to be obliged to dispense with one after another of the jewels that have been so long in the Sirstoff family. It is awful that she is forced to pay blackmail to those Russian spies. The Countess quite has my sympathy. Indeed, I should not mind paying her thirty thousand dollars instead of the twenty-five. But that is entirely between you and me, Mr. Beaufort—that is, I presume you are Mr. Beaufort, having heard Mr. Arthur speak so often of you. And now I must be going. You have no idea what a relief it is to me to know that the Countess is on the way. As I told Mr. Arthur, I want him to bring her directly to my house. If he should still be occupied with this distressing case, perhaps you will do so. I hope to be able to interest Mr. Deforrest in her and through his influence to find a way that will put an end to her being victimized by those villainous spies."

As the society leader concluded her words, she arose.

"Permit me to let you out by my private door," said Digger. "It will save you the unpleasantness of coming in contact with the police in the other room."

And with a word of appreciation, Mrs. Deforrest passed through the door which the great detective held open for her—and hastily closed after she had gained the corridor.

Could the famed society leader have seen the actions of the supposed Beaufort as soon as the walls of the room hid him from view she would have been rudely shocked!

Wringing his hands and capering around like a boy, Digger exclaimed to himself:

"I've learned the name of the woman in black—who, I believe to be the head of the smuggling band—and I've learned the name of one of the go-betweens. I've also proved the correctness of my theory that Arthur has been disposing of the smuggled diamonds to women of wealth and position. The story of persecution by Russian spies is certainly clever—just the sort of thing that would appeal to American women. But I'm sorely afraid, Mrs. Deforrest, that you will not be able to wear the Sirstoff necklace to the Rogers' ball. Indeed, I shall take every step in my power to see that you don't. This is certainly ample revenge for the treatment I have received at the hands of James Arthur. But the most difficult task of all is

still ahead of me—the rounding-up of the diamond smugglers!"

Not long, however, did the great detective revel in the delight caused by the interview with the distinguished society leader. He realized that Arthur and the Sirstoff woman had promised to deliver the gems that night and, as they were only valued at twenty thousand dollars, while the dupe had agreed to pay five thousand more for them, to say nothing of her statement to him that she intended to add an equal sum out of pity for the alleged Countess, he knew that the smugglers would leave no stone unturned to carry out the delivery of the diamonds. Furthermore, he was convinced that Arthur would apprise the woman in black with the fact that his offices had been raided and that he was on their trail.

"I don't know how the 'Countess' managed to fool the matron into thinking that she did not have the gems—but I do know this, she will use every effort to deliver them!" he said to himself. "The thing for me to do is to get in touch with the Sirstoff!"

Having come to this conclusion, the famous mystery-solver lost no time in opening the door into the private office.

Eagerly his assistants, the secret service men and the police looked at him as he entered the room to which they had been driven. But never a word did the detective vouchsafe of what had transpired in the private office of the smuggler.

"Sergeant, you will now post your men as I told you. Toby, you and Yank will return to my rooms where I will send you word as to what I want you to do. The rest of you will go down to the offices and await my coming. As I said before, watch out for trouble on the way. If it comes, devote your attention to memorizing the faces of the men who collide with you, should such a thing happen. The papers are of practically no consequence. In fact, I only want you to take them in the hope that some more of the band may endeavor to recover them. I will be at your headquarters in an hour or so—unless there is some new development."

Without waiting to see the fulfilment of his instructions, the famous mystery-solver left the offices of James Arthur, went down in the elevator and hastened to the subway where he took a train from which he departed at Wall street.

But the detective who walked down the famed street did not appear as the same one who had attempted to raid the offices in the Chester building.

Calling into use his wonderful ability to change his facial expression, by a deft touching of his hat he made himself appear as an entirely different person, his clothes of blue serge differing in no way from those of countless others whom he passed on the street.

Arrived before a neck-breaking sky-scraper, the mystery-solver entered it and was soon in the offices of Deforrest and Company, bankers.

Taking out his card, Digger wrote on it the words: "Of the utmost importance," and gave it to one of the clerks with the request that it be taken to Humphrey Deforrest without delay, receiving in a few moments the information that the head of the banking firm would see him.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, Mr. Barry?" inquired the banker, when the two men were alone. "I have often heard of you—and your ability. Have you discovered any suspicious circumstances in connection with any of the men who serve me?"

"It is about Mrs. Deforrest that I wish to speak to you," returned the great detective, quietly.

"Sir?" exclaimed the banker, the color mounting to his face.

"I wish to save her—and through her you—from becoming the dupes of the so-called Countess Sirstoff."

"The Countess Sirstoff? What do you know about her?" demanded the man of finance, rising from his chair.

"I have reason to believe that she is an impostor who is playing upon the sympathies of Mrs. Deforrest," returned the detective.

"Playing upon the sympathies of *Mrs.* Deforrest? Why, man alive, I have notes of hers for fifteen thousand dollars in my strong box this very minute! What do you know against her? Speak, man, speak!"

"I *know* simply this, that I advise you to take any means you have within your power to realize on the notes without delay—but I am convinced that she is the head of the most daring band of smugglers that ever operated in the United States!"

"The persecuted and dainty Marie Sirstoff a smuggler? Preposterous, Mr. Barry! This is but another attempt of the Russian government to turn from her the few friends the poor Countess has in this country!"

"From whom did you learn about this persecution?" inquired Digger, calmly.

"Why, from James Arthur and from her."

"Ah, I thought as much. You didn't take the trouble to make any inquiries about her from the Russian ambassador at Washington?"

"After hearing her story, no! They would only tell me some lie!"

"But they would probably have saved your wife many thousands of dollars. Now don't interrupt me please. I'm thoroughly familiar with all the peerages—it's my business to be, on account of the bogus noblemen and women who come to this country and obtain, or try to obtain, money from gullible society people—and I can tell you that there never was such a title as Countess Marie Sirstoff! Furthermore, the diamonds your wife intends to purchase for twenty-five thousand dollars are only worth twenty thousand according to the appraisal of the United States customs officials—and they have been smuggled into this country after being purchased in Brussels!"

During this speech, the banker had grown almost purple, first pacing up and down his office then dropping into his chair, the arms of which he clutched convulsively.

"What proof have you of this?" he finally demanded, hoarsely.

In reply, the famous mystery-solver told of his being called into the smuggling case, the telegram from the woman in black and the subsequent developments at the Chester Building.

At the end of the narration, Mr. Deforrest rose from his chair and traversed his room to and fro for several minutes, in an evident attempt to master his emotions.

"What course do you advise, Mr. Barry?" he finally asked. "You can understand, without my going into detail, that I am willing to pay anything rather than that this business should become public!"

At these words, the great detective's eyes snapped ominously.

"I realize that you are laboring under great stress, Mr. Deforrest," he replied with what calmness he could muster, "and for that reason I overlook your insulting remark in regard to hush money. But in justice to myself, I wish to say that, were it not for the fact that I have agreed to run down these diamond smugglers and that my good friend, the chief of the secret service is now lying in the hospital with a skull crushed by one of the band, I would not lift a finger to save you or your family a single cent after the words you have just spoken!"

Probably never before in his life had the proud banker been addressed in such a manner and for several minutes he glared at the slim man before him as though he would crush him.

But Digger returned his stare unflinchingly!

"What means do you suggest for me to recover the money I have loaned the woman?" Mr. Deforrest finally asked. "And how shall I protect my wife? She expects to have the Countess visit her."

"As to the money you have loaned, you're a banker. I decline to have anything to do with the matter. My interest is simply to round-up the diamond smugglers."

"But I will pay you twice the amount of the notes if you will enable me to recover on them."

"Money, Mr. Deforrest, is of no object to me," rejoined Digger, with the utmost indifference. "My purpose in coming down here was to ask that I be permitted to have one of my assistants go to your house and await the possible coming of the Sirstoff woman. To tell you the truth, however, I haven't the slightest idea that she will put in an appearance there. After the raid on Arthur's offices, he will undoubtedly wire her and she will leave the train long before it reaches New York. Knowing what I now do, I should say that in a few days, Mrs. Deforrest will receive a letter from some city in the Middlewest saying that the Russian spies have caused the 'Countess' to flee for her life and that upon a receipt of a telegram, she will forward the diamonds, provided the majority of their price is telegraphed to her in advance."

"The very game she worked once before!" ejaculated the banker, as the great detective ceased speaking. And then, as the realization that he, astute man of the world as he thought himself, had been so duped by a beautiful woman, he leaped from his chair: "We must get her, Barry, no matter what the expense! I'm willing to lose the money—but I want the satisfaction of knowing that the woman who swindled me is locked behind the bars!"

CHAPTER XI.

DIGGER DEPRIVES THE "COUNTESS" OF TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.

With the faintest flicker of a smile playing about his mouth the great detective looked at the banker.

"Then you are willing I should station one of my assistants at your house against the arrival of the Sirstoff—which as I told you before— I do not think likely to occur?"

"Assuredly, one or a dozen. But isn't there some way by which we can capture the woman on the train, thus precluding any possibility of her escape? Why wouldn't it be the thing for you to take a train to some station and then board the one upon which she is traveling?"

"I had intended doing that. I was going up to Albany and had arranged with the chief of the secret service to have a telegram sent to his man Jenks, instructing him to leave the woman in black at that station. That, however, was before the developments in the Chester Building. It is now too late for me to catch any train that will get me to Albany in time to board the Montreal express. Furthermore, from what I know of Arthur, he has undoubtedly informed the Sirstoff woman of what has occurred on this end, thus enabling her to leave the train."

"But I thought you said something about a secret service agent named Jenks travelling with her, in order to keep watch of her? Can't you get some word to him that will enable him to prevent her from giving us the slip?"

"I have thought of that. But as more than an hour has elapsed since the raid on Arthur's offices, I think it would be useless."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Keep my eye on her trunks."

"But I thought you told me they had been searched by the custom officials?"

"So I did. The fact that they failed to find the diamonds, however, does not convince me that they are not concealed somewhere in the woman's luggage. Indeed, I believe the reason they have failed to find them was that they were looking for uncut stones, whereas, according to Mrs. Deforrest, the diamonds were in the form of a necklace—and it would be much easier to conceal it in a false bottom or side of a trunk, or bag, than about her person."

"Then why not run up, meet the express and examine the baggage at your leisure on the way back to the city? It seems to me that would be much more satisfactory and liable to produce results than awaiting the arrival of the train at the station here in New York and then confiscating the trunks. It would certainly save you time in case you didn't find the necklace."

"It most certainly would. The great difficulty in the way of carrying out the plan, however, is to intercept the express at a station which would give me opportunity to make thorough examination of the trunks because it will require several hours to get to such a station."

"And that is just where I can help you. Through my influence as a director in the railroad over which the express is now traveling, I can arrange to have the train held up for an hour or so at Albany. I presume you would have ample time to conduct your examination of the woman's luggage between that city and this?"

"More than ample. The question is how to get to Albany."

"Which is no problem at all. For in the same manner that I can have the train held, I can have a special engine placed at your disposal, so that you can get to the upstate city in time to catch the express."

"That will certainly be kind of you, very kind of you, Mr. Deforrest. And while you are making the necessary arrangements, I will send a wire to Jenks." And, taking his note book from his pocket, the great detective wrote: "Jenks, on board the Montreal Express, down-bound. Do not lose sight of the woman in black. If she leaves the train follow her and wire headquarters, New York.—E. H."

For some time, the detective debated as to what signature he should sign to the message but, after deliberation, it seemed to him wisest to sign that of the injured chief for the reason that it would not confuse the agent.

While Digger was busy writing the message, the banker had called for the executive offices of the railroad and during the necessary interval until he had received his connection, he asked:

"Should you like to have me send the wire from my office, here, Mr. Barry? It would save time and if you have any telephoning to do, I should be pleased to have you use my instruments."

Gladly the great detective accepted the offers and when a clerk had carried away the telegram, he took one of the telephones and asked to be connected with the headquarters of the secret service.

After learning that no further word had been received from the customs official on the train, Digger announced his intention of going to Albany, requesting that any word received from Jenks be forwarded to him at the station or there. This done, he then despatched a note to Toby, instructing him to go to the station immediately to await his arrival and to have Yank go to the home of the Deforrest's in case the alleged Countess should, in her desperate straights, seek refuge in the home of the influential family she still believed to be her friends.

By the time these matters had been attended to, the banker had made all arrangements for the holding of the express and the special engine.

"Do you know, Barry, I should like to go with you and confront that woman with her perfidy?" Deforrest announced.

"I don't doubt it," smiled the famous mystery-solver.

"Why shouldn't I," continued the banker, as the idea grew on him.

"Because such proceeding would involve you in too great danger. This band will stop at nothing in order to keep their liberty, once they learn that the net is closing about them."

"Yet you are going to meet them practically single handed."

"But I am more accustomed to taking care of myself in dangerous situations than you are and, furthermore, I am not a power in finance. If they should get me, it would be merely an incident to my calling."

"I suppose you are right," assented the banker, reluctantly. "Nevertheless, I don't know anything that would give me more satisfaction than to have a hand in bringing to book these scoundrels who have so imposed upon Mrs. Deforrest and me."

"You are taking a hand—and a big one—by enabling me to get to Albany," returned Digger. "I trust that my success will be worth your trouble." And the great detective arose from his chair and started for the door.

But as he had his hand on the knob, the banker called him back.

"I say, Barry, if you do find the necklace, I wish you'd arrange in some way with the customs people for me to get possession of it by paying the duty. I'd like to have something to show for my money."

Ere the detective could reply, however, one of the banker's telephones rang.

"That's my house 'phone," exclaimed Deforrest. "Perhaps Mrs. Deforrest has already heard from the Sirstoff woman, as you anticipated." And he quickly placed the receiver to his ear.

"But why do you want ten thousand dollars in cash sent up to the house right away?" he asked, with a look full of meaning at the famous mystery-solver. "Won't a cheque do just as well? Oh, you want to send the money by telegraph? To whom, pray, and for what? Oh, the Countess is in trouble? How do you know? A wire from her? Russian spies have turned up again, I suppose? I thought so. See here, Lucille I think that woman is trying to work you. Under the circumstances, I do not wish you to send the money to her. Yes, I know you wanted to wear the diamonds to the Rogers' ball but your agreement was to pay for them upon delivery. Oh, the ten thousand is necessary to insure your getting them tonight? Well, if you send it, you will lose it in addition to the diamonds. What do I mean? Simply that the Sirstoff woman has been playing upon your sympathies. She isn't half so much Countess as you are and she is a smuggler. How do I know? I'll tell you that when I reach home. Yes, I suppose you are disappointed about the necklace. I'll try to find one for you. Oh, the woman wants your answer? Just a minute and I'll tell you what to say." And the banker looked toward Digger to signify that he wished him to frame the reply to be sent to the impostor Countess.

"Why not say 'Money will be paid upon delivery of necklace if stones are satisfactory.'"

"Just the thing," returned Deforrest and he repeated the message through the telephone to his wife and after a few more words put down the instrument. "You seem to have sized the situation up to a 'T,' Barry," he exclaimed. "If you hadn't come down here, I should have been out ten more thousand dollars for I should certainly have sent the money to Mrs. Deforrest, knowing how eager she was to procure the necklace in time to wear to the ball. But I mustn't keep you longer. I shall be keen to hear whether you find the diamonds or not. If you need my assistance in any way, let me know. Good luck to you."

And for many minutes after the great detective had left his private office, the banker reflected upon the ease with which both he and his wife had been hypnotized by the title of nobility.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SMUGGLERS PASS THE DECREE OF DEATH AGAINST DIGGER.

Though matters seemed to be shaping themselves most satisfactorily to the rounding-up of the diamond smugglers and the bogus Countess, Digger was by no means confident that success would mark the outcome. His experience at the Chester building had proved to him that James Arthur was not only a man of resource but that he was at the head of a highly developed system of spies, wherefore he presumed that, although by changing the features of his face he had escaped espionage on his visit to Wall street, the return of his assistants to his rooms would be noted and reported to the pseudo-investment broker, as well as the arrival of his note sent from the banker's office and the subsequent departure of Toby for the railroad station. That the return of his aids from the office building would be interpreted as proof that he and the chief had been rescued from the vault he did not doubt and the famous mystery-solver was more worried lest he or Toby be waylaid before they could board the special engine than he would have cared to admit to anyone.

The telegram from the woman on the train to the banker's wife was evidence to him that Arthur had informed her of the raid on the offices from which she would understand the danger that threatened her arrival in New York. Indeed, the demand upon Mrs. Deforrest for the ten thousand dollars seemed to indicate that she had decided not to come to the city and fervently he hoped that Jenks would be clever enough not to lose sight of the woman, even before his instructions to that effect should reach him, for he realized that once she disappeared only luck would bring him across her trail again.

A firm believer in the old adage that "in numbers there is safety," upon leaving the banker's offices Digger had again changed his facial appearance and made for the subway where he boarded an express train and was soon at the station.

But no sooner had he arrived than he was confronted by a new difficulty!

Going to the information booth merely as a matter of precaution, he was unpleasantly surprised to find a message awaiting him, and tearing open the envelope, he read:

"Jenks left the train at Holden and was left behind. Tracy, Acting Chief of Secret Service."

Tearing the paper into tiny bits, Digger threw them to the floor impatiently.

"I don't blame Arthur for calling those agents 'boneheads,'" he growled. "Why, Holden isn't even a telegraph station. What on earth Jenks was thinking of to leave the train at such a place I can't imagine. Now the woman is alone and unwatched and can do as she pleases. There's only one thing to do and that is to wire the men in charge of the baggage cars not to put off any of the trunks or other luggage belonging to the Sirstoff—and I've even got to trust to luck that they know about their being searched and which ones they are. If they don't, and the trunks are put off, the

woman will be able to make a clean getaway, diamonds and all."

But the great detective was accustomed to working under discouraging conditions and seemingly hopeless chances and he did not allow his fears to impair his judgment or determination and, going to the train despatcher's office, where he introduced himself, he soon had the order not to put the woman's trunks off or to allow anyone to touch them flashing over the wire.

"How soon shall you want your special engine, Mr. Barry?" asked the chief despatcher, when the message, upon which Digger placed such hopes, had been sent.

"The minute my assistant arrives—which ought to be any time now," returned the great detective.

"Then I'll order it run down to the train shed and to have steam kept up."

As the minutes went by without the appearance of Toby, Digger paced the floor anxiously. Every moment, almost, was precious for he did not wish to hold the express at Albany any longer than necessary and he realized all too well that some of the smuggler band might have attacked his assistant and either taken him prisoner or injured him so that it would be necessary to take him to a hospital. And, when a quarter of an hour had passed without any sign of him, the detective decided that he could not wait longer.

Taking out his note book, he hurriedly wrote:

"Toby: Meet the Montreal express tonight. Stay by the baggage car and watch where all trunks with a piece of white string tied to their handles are taken. If the woman leaves the train at any way station, I shall trail her."

So engrossed was the detective in writing his instructions for his assistant that he did not notice the entrance of a tall, thin woman and it was not until he heard one of the despatchers exclaim; "Whom do you wish to see, madam?" that he was aware of anyone having come in.

But instead of answering, the woman walked over to the detective.

Fearing an emissary of the smugglers, Digger dropped his hand to his revolver, the while he scanned the features of the woman closely. Then of a sudden, his face brightened.

"By Cricky! Toby, but you came pretty near fooling me!" he exclaimed. "Your get-up is certainly a crackerjack. But why did you do it?"

"Arthur's men are thicker than flies round molasses at your rooms, Digger. But this rig fooled them."

"I don't wonder. Did any of them follow you?"

"I'm not sure. I didn't waste time looking behind me."

"H'm. We'd best not take any chances. Just wait while I ask the despatcher if there is any way we can get to our engine without going down into the station."

To his delight, the detective learned that he could go out the way used by employers and after receiving a card that would enable him to examine any baggage that he chose, Digger and Toby went down to their engine and were soon thundering over the rails at a record-breaking speed.

But could the famous detective have been in a back room of the Jolly Roger saloon in Hell's Kitchen and heard the decree declared against him, brave as he was, he would have been unnerved!

The moment that James Arthur had felt himself safe from pursuit after his flight from the Chester building, he had ordered the chauffeur of his taxicab to drive to a telegraph office where he wrote a message to the Queen of the Smugglers, apprising her of the raid and the fact that Digger Barry was on the case and, after requesting that it be sent as quickly as possible, was then driven to the Jolly Roger.

From the familiarity with which he was greeted by the bartender, it was evident that he was no stranger in the dive despite his affluent appearance—and such was the case, for the Jolly Roger was the harbor of the smugglers in times of stress.

"Any of the boys round?" Arthur inquired, as he made his way into the back room.

"Only Mike the Dip."

"Send him to me," returned the smuggler, adding to himself, "he's the best one of the gang for doing what I want. I'm in luck, surely, to-day. If Marie can only land that society dame, we'll be able to make a swell clean-up. To think that I not only found out that Digger was on our trail but that I piped his assistants and got the best of him and that secret service dub!"

And at the memory of the manner in which he had captured the two manhunters and locked them in the vault, the fellow broke into hilarious laughter.

But he was too shrewd, however, not to know that Digger and the chief would be quickly released and it was for the purpose of finding out just what was being done at the offices and the disposition of the members of the band who had posed as clerks and stenographers that he proposed to utilize the ability of Mike the Dip to sneak around seemingly unseen.

Accordingly when that worthy appeared, Arthur gave him his instructions, with the additional injunction to return within an hour. Yet the smuggler was not prepared for the report that his spy brought back!

As he heard of the confiscation of all books, files and correspondence, the arrest of the clerks and stenographers and the stationing of the police in the offices, Arthur leaped to his feet and tore round the room like a mad man.

"Get the gang together, Mike, get them together! I thought that I had given Digger a kick that would send him to the hospital as well as the chief! As I haven't the world isn't large enough to hold us both!

Jump lively, now! Get into your good clothes, this is the time of day when the bunch will be at the hotels lunching. I'll call a taxi for you while you dress."

"Suppose some of the molls have some swell ginks in tow, wot then?" queried Mike the Dip.

"Get the summons to them just the same—we're up against the most serious proposition we've ever been, boy! I only wish Marie were here. It means a head like hers to lay out our course under the circumstances."

Never had the pickpocket seen the smuggler show signs of terror before and he lost not a moment in changing into clothes that made him as presentable as any well-to-do young man and by the time he had effected his metamorphosis the taxicab was waiting for him.

Ordering the chauffeur to drive to the Princess, Mike the Dip prepared the tokens that were used to summon the members of the band of smugglers when it was inexpedient to speak to them. These silent, but none the less powerful, messengers consisted of bits of red ribbon. When the call was merely for a general meeting, one knot was tied in them but when it was a matter of grave import, like the present, three knots were tied. Because of his marvelous agility with his hands, being able to reach out and drop the token so quickly that none could see the motion, the pickpocket was always chosen to call the band together, on account of which duty he kept a supply of the tiny bits of ribbon in his pockets.

As there were only eight members to be summoned, now that seven of them were in the jail, Mike had ample time to tie the significant knots before he arrived at the hotel and he employed his spare time in going through his pockets to see what he had that might cause him trouble in the event of his being arrested, concealing everything that he thought suspicious around the cushion of the cab in which he was riding.

Arrived at the Princess, the pickpocket bade the chauffeur wait and then made a tour of the various corridors, palm rooms, cafés and restaurants.

Three of the men he found talking together in the lobby and no task at all was it for him to pass them and drop the ribbons in their laps. But with the other five, four of whom were women, he was put to more trouble for all the latter were lunching with men and the one man was enjoying a tête-a-tête with a very stylishly dressed woman.

Under ordinary circumstances, he would not have ventured near them, waiting until some time when they should be alone before delivering the summons. But Arthur's instructions had been explicit and accordingly he walked through the restaurant, as though looking for some one, and succeeded in dropping the ribbons into the laps of the four women without attracting any attention, and he had equal luck with the man in the palm room.

So apparently refined, well-educated and well-groomed were the women—it was their usual pose that they had come from some Western city for the opera season and were temporarily embarrassed wherefore they wished to pledge a diamond until their funds should arrive and that they had made bold to approach the men with whom they were because of their distinguished appearance and kindly manner—that no one would suspect them of being members of a gang of smugglers and could their escorts have seen them feverishly counting with their fingers the number of knots in the ribbons they had been given, they would have been amazed.

Fortunately for them, they had all nearly finished eating so they were not put to the task of offering excuses, deeming it advisable, as the four were in the one room, to wait rather than attract the attention they would should they all leave and not return.

But once they were outside the dining-room, the shrift they gave their escorts was short and soon they were speeding toward the Jolly Roger.

When all had arrived, Arthur lost no time in explaining to them the cause of the meeting.

"There is just one thing about it," he said, in conclusion. "So long as Digger Barry is alive we are all in danger! Therefore, in the name of Marie Sirstoff, your Queen, I pronounce the decree of death against the detective—and a thousand dollars to the one who puts an end to our hated enemy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

YANK PLAYS HIDE-AND-SEEK WITH THE SMUGGLER SPIES.

Never a word did the members of the smuggling gang utter as the terrible decree was pronounced by their captain. But in accordance with their custom, each picked up the glass in front of him and drank the liquor—silent token of obedience.

Thus assured of the support of his fellows in crime, Arthur exclaimed:

"Where Digger is now, I don't know. The easiest way to find him is to watch his lodgings. He has two assistants, one tall and slim, who looks like a fool, the other shorter and only a boy in appearance. But both men are powerful, so don't make the mistake of underestimating their strength. If you have the opportunity, capture one or both of them and bring them to me. By putting them on the rack, we may be able to extract some information from them as to their master's whereabouts. Now get busy! Probably the

easiest way to catch our man is to enter his house and hide somewhere. But don't try the gas-man gag. Bill the Bruiser worked that for me this morning. I had him watching the secret service office and he trailed a messenger and that's how I got onto the fact that Digger had been called into the case. He might be able to give us some tips if we could get to him but he returned just in time to be caught in the raid and there's no use in running the risk of capture by attempting to see him or any of the others at the jail."

"Where shall you be, in case we want to get in touch with you?" inquired one of the women.

"I'm going to my house in the Bronx right away, in case the Queen wires. Then I shall go down to the station to meet the express—we've got to meet the coffin, no matter what happens or whether Marie comes to the city or not. Brass Knuckles, in the absence of the Bruiser and Panhandle, you and Stiletto must meet it."

"Is the box coming under the same name as usual?" inquired the latter member of the gang, whose name was so suggestive.

"By our Queen! It was lucky you spoke of it, Stiletto! This time Marie thought it best to make a change and the coffin will bear the label 'Henry Smith, 4411 Maple Avenue, The Bronx.' I'd told Bruiser about the new name but if you hadn't mentioned it, I should have forgotten to tell you and you might have had trouble in getting it. You will, of course, wear your expressman's uniform. I shall wear my blonde beard and wig. After you have loaded the box onto the wagon, I'll follow in a carriage. Sylvia, you had better be on hand with a speedy automobile for Marie, in case she really should come. Take a roundabout route to the house. The diamonds have got to be delivered surely by eleven to Mrs. Deforrest. If Marie thinks it advisable, you may accompany her. She will probably pass a few days with the society leader. You can pose as her companion. Remember, you're up against the toughest proposition the gang has ever been called upon to face! *Digger is a different sort of man from the secret service boneheads!*"

Thoroughly impressed with the desperateness of the danger which threatened the life and liberty of the gang until the great detective could be put out of the way, the men and women who had been summoned from the hotel dispersed each to their several places of abode in order to get into the disguises each thought would be the best to wear in order to carry out the decree, and in due course they took up their vigil outside Digger's residence, as Toby had reported to his master.

Each of the smugglers on guard had seen the messenger when he entered with the note sent by the famous mystery-solver but because Banker Deforrest did not keep his employes in uniform they were not sure of his mission and Yank had had the wisdom to have him pass out by a rear gate which opened onto another street and, by taking the same course, Toby had been able to elude the spies.

Yank, however, was less fortunate in escaping them.

Deeming it inadvisable to remain longer in the house, he doubly locked and bolted all the doors, against any attempt to gain an entrance during the absence of the great detective and both assistants, and took his departure through a steel shuttered cellar window which had been constructed for just such an emergency. But when he reached the head of the street, he ran right into two of the spies!

The recognition was mutual and then began a chase that would have been amusing had it not been so terribly desperate!

Heading for the nearest subway entrance, Yank boarded a train, only to be followed by the two members of the smuggling band. Making his way inside the car, which was well filled, he worked his way to the farther end and at the next station got out with the purpose of going up to the street. But while he stopped to survey the passengers who had alighted, to learn whether or not the men who were shadowing him had also debarked, he noticed three women acting rather curiously and, fearing that they might be members of the gang who had followed him, he decided to wait in the underground station and board the next train.

This proved to be an express and when he entered, he was relieved to see that the women of whom he had been afraid did not board it. And he was congratulating himself upon the ease with which he had given the spies the slip when he was amazed to behold the two men he thought he had lost enter the very car in which he was, at the next stop of the train!

For two hours, the great detective's assistant rode from one end of the subway to the other, occasionally varying the monotony by getting out at one station and waiting for the next train. But the spies were not to be fooled the same way twice, and, always managing to get a position close to the man they were shadowing, every time he debarked they followed.

Maddened to think that he could not escape them, Yank suddenly conceived a bright idea!

Noticing that each train was more and more crowded, he finally managed to get standing room close to one of the side exits and when he reached one of the stations where the passengers changed from local to express trains, he stepped out and remained close to the door. As before, the spies followed and no sooner did Yank see that they were safely out and being borne away from the train by the pressing throng than he forced his way back into the car just before the doors were shut!

Mentally congratulating himself, the assistant of the great detective determined not to be caught as he had before and, leaving the train at the next station, he ran up to the street, hailed a waiting taxicab and was driven to the home of Banker Deforrest, which he reached about an hour after the banker himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUEEN OF THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS OUTWITS THE SECRET SERVICE AGENT.

During the exciting battle of wits between the forces directed by the great detective and the members of the band of smugglers in New York, the woman about whom the strife was waged was alternately cursing Digger and wracking her brain for some way in which she could carry out her plan of making a fortune out of the society leader, not alone by selling her the diamond necklace for more than the stones were worth but of obtaining many thousands of dollars by playing upon her sympathies.

Aware that she was being shadowed by Jenks, she realized that by having him as her traveling companion it would be much easier for her to keep watch of his movements than if he were in another car and she were obliged to trust to luck in seeing him when he either left the train to send or receive despatches, as she had been at the station from which she sent the telegram to James Arthur giving warning of the danger in which she was.

Unfortunately, so clever was her motive for summoning the secret service agent that he never divined it.

And when he joined her, in response to the request delivered by the newsboy, she opened upon him with all the batteries of her beauty of her seeming helplessness and of her wits, sharpened by long experience in winning sympathy and conducting smuggling and swindling operations.

Knowing that the other occupants of the parlor car would deem her action in inviting the companionship of the very man against whose orders to subject herself to search she had uttered such vigorous protest strange, to say the least, when the agent joined her she spoke in a tone that made her voice plainly audible to all who were sitting in chairs near her.

"I know that you will think my asking you to come to me remarkable," she exclaimed, as Jenks dropped into the chair next to hers, "but after I had considered the matter, I could tell from the considerate manner in which you acted that you were merely carrying out your instructions, and because I realize you are a man of high ideals, evidenced by your strict adherence to duty, I have decided to appeal to you, as a real man, for advice in my desperate position. *Instead of being a smuggler as you suspect, I am the object of persecution by Russian spies!* It is clear to me that this information about my receiving a package of uncut diamonds from a man on the steamer in Montreal is but another of the diabolical plots of my persecutors to cause my downfall!" And then lowering her voice but not so much that her whisper would fail to reach her neighbors, she added: "The course of my being hounded is because I refuse to become the morganatic wife of one of the Grand Dukes! My beauty, of which I used to be so proud when my husband was alive, has become my curse!"

The effect of these words, uttered hesitatingly and with frequent outbursts of temper was all that the woman could desire, both upon the secret agent and her fellow travellers!

Within the breast of the custom official there burned that indignation which all Americans are supposed to feel when they hear of the measures to which foreign noblemen of royal blood are supposed to resort whenever they fall in love with a beauty below them in birth and as he gazed at the lithe form of the exquisite woman, convulsing with sobs, he longed to have the Grand Duke or any of his spies where he could lay hands on them.

Yet Jenks was not so carried away by his feelings of sympathy that he did not remember the woman was a smuggler suspect and for several minutes he pondered over his course, thankful for the deep emotion of the dainty creature which prevented the necessity of his declaring himself immediately.

But the self-created countess was not so overcome by her feelings that she was not able to watch between the fingers raised to her face the effect of her words upon the secret service man. And when she saw that he was in a brown study, she deemed it time to act.

Hastily drying her eyes with a dainty lace kerchief, she leaned forward, looking the agent straight in the eye and timidly rested one hand on his arm.

"Will you help me?" she breathed. "Will you protect me against attack until I reach my friends?"

The magnetism of her touch, as her hand lay upon his arm, her pleading eyes and the intoxicating aroma that seemed to come from her wonderful hair proved more than the intensely human agent could resist.

"I will—if you can prove what you say," he replied hoarsely.

At the words of doubt, the Queen of the Smugglers again showed her understanding of mankind and drew back as though struck a cruel blow, once more giving way to violent weeping.

The realization that he was the cause of this fresh grief drove the last particle of caution from Jenks.

"Pardon my request," he exclaimed. "I spoke before I thought. But there are so many titled impostors—that is—I mean it is a favorite form of——" And the agent paused in confusion.

"Yes, yes, I understand," murmured the woman. "It is but right that you should wish to know that I am what I claim to be before you engage yourself to help me combat the dangers with which I am surrounded. Fortunately, I have a letter in my bag that will prove sufficient, I think. I presume you have heard of Mrs. Humphrey Deforrest, in New York?"

"The wife of the banker?"

"Yes."

"Indeed, I have."

"Then this letter should satisfy you. I'll just show you the first part, for it is too personal to let you read it all. See, it begins: 'You Poor Dear Countess: I am troubled more than I can express to think that you have again become the object of persecution from that monster, the Grand Duke. Heartily do I approve of your plan of coming to New York and I shall be most honored to have you come and pass a few days with me until we can arrange about your future. And you may rest assured that in *our* house you will be free from the espionage of those horrid Russians.' The rest of the letter, as I said, is very personal," declared the woman, folding the paper and putting it back in the envelope.

But had she read the next sentence, she would have betrayed herself for it said:

"I shall, indeed, be pleased to assist you by purchasing the necklace."

Jenks, however, was not gifted with second sight and could not read through the envelope and the extract that he had heard was sufficient to convince him that the woman was the Countess she professed to be and that her story of persecution was true.

"Again I crave your pardon for having doubted you," he stammered. "But I will try to make amends by the care with which I will guard you until I can place you in the powerful protection of the Deforrests."

And the dazzling smile with which the beautiful creature acknowledged his fealty sent the blood coursing through his heart the more rapidly while the other men in the car looked at him as though they would welcome the opportunity to change places with him.

"Is there anything I can do for you now?" he asked.

"Nothing but keep watch of all who enter the car. The experiences of the morning have tired me and I should like to try to catch a few minutes' sleep." And whirling her chair until she faced the window, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers closed her eyes.

But though the woman appeared to sleep, she was in reality thinking hard.

Having successfully allayed the agent's suspicions that she was a smuggler, she was confronted with the task of getting rid of him. For she realized all too well that any moment something might happen that would change her cleverly won safety into direst danger—and she knew that her chance of escape would be greater were the secret service man out of the way than if he were at hand.

Yet how to dismiss him without either hurting his feelings or arousing his suspicions, in view of the method she had adopted to win his support, was no easy task to determine. Plan after plan which would have served were he not a government agent she was forced to discard and she was still undecided when the train stopped at a station and the porter immediately entered the car with a telegram.

"Message for Mrs. Marie Sirstoff!" he called.

At the obviously foreign name, all the occupants of the car looked toward the woman in black.

Gladly would she have allowed the man to pass through the car without claiming the telegram, for she felt intuitively that it contained bad news, but she was conscious that all eyes were turned upon her and, arousing with a well-feigned start, she looked at the porter and then asked:

"What name did you say?"

"Mrs. Marie Sirstoff, lady."

"Then the message is for me," and she reached out her hand for the yellow envelope.

All her power did it require to steady her fingers as she tore the envelope and after one glance at the telegram, she sank back in her chair in an apparent faint—but she took good care to cling fast to the yellow slip.

What she had read was: "D. B. Dediar in offices. Lost him. Erac. J. A."

Realizing that Arthur had resorted to her use of inverted words, she readily grasped that the real wording of the message was "Digger Barry raided in offices. Lost him. Care."

Noting that the secret service agent was watching her closely, the woman made a seemingly great effort to control herself and leaned toward him.

"This message is from my agent in New York," she said. "He tells me that one of the Russian spies has levied upon some property I have there and warns me to be very careful. So I am not only again beset by my enemies but they have rendered me practically penniless. Oh, look at that man just coming into the car! I am sure he is one of the spies!"

Turning at her command, Jenks beheld a very foreign looking man and as the fellow took a seat and proceeded to stare at the beauty in black, he was convinced that her fears were correct.

"I notice they have just put on the dining car. Suppose we go in there. We can stay some time and I will see if I can't arrange to have a chair for you in some other car where you will not be subject to that brute's watching you," he said in a low voice.

Readily the woman assented and they were soon in the dining car, where they remained until the train began to slow down at another station.

Thanks to a curve in the track, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers could see from her window that the place was of but little importance, for a flag had been put out to stop the express, and she hurriedly decided upon a bold stroke to rid herself of the agent.

"Oh, I feel faint!" she suddenly gasped. "Suppose we go out in the platform for a few minutes."

Willingly Jenks agreed. But no sooner had they reached the end of the car than the woman gave a lurch toward the steps, then caught herself just in time to prevent her falling.

In alarm, the secret service agent thrust out his hands to seize her but as he did so, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers cried:

"I've lost my purse. It dropped from my hand when I caught the guard rail. Will you *please* get it for me? It contains papers of the greatest importance to me!"

Never dreaming that he was being made the victim of the Sirstoff's cunning, the secret service agent jumped to the ground and ran back along the track to the spot toward which the woman was pointing.

No purse did he see, however, and he was beginning to look along the sides of the rails when the train started.

Shouting and waving his arms, Jenks strove to attract the attention of some one who would stop the express but no one saw him and the train steamed away leaving him at a station where he quickly found there was not even a telegraph operator!

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURPLE COFFIN.

Remaining on the platform only long enough to make sure that the secret service agent did not catch the train, the woman who had so played upon his chivalry returned to the dining car.

Scarce able to keep from shouting aloud, so happy was she at the success of her ruse, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers, however, noticed that the attendants in the car were eying her curiously.

Accordingly, she determined to take time by the forelock and beckoned to the headwaiter.

"My companion got off the train to search for a purse which I dropped and was left behind," she explained. "It's very annoying because it contained all my money, so that I cannot pay for our food. But if you will give me your name, I will send the money to you as soon as my friend rejoins me, which will be at the next station, for I shall get off there and wait for him."

Again the woman's beauty came to her rescue for, accustomed as the headwaiter was to having people try to work him for free meals, so aristocratic was the appearance of the pseudo-countess that he gave her his card without remonstrance.

Having succeeded in swindling the man out of the lunch money, the Sirstoff determined to make still further use of him.

"I wonder if you would mind going into my car, the second one ahead, and bringing me my pony coat just before we get to Albany?" she asked. But the headwaiter was evidently so surprised at the request that she hastened to add: "I see that I must take you into my confidence." And she turned upon her proposed dupe her most winning smile. "There is a man in that car who has been annoying me by staring at me. That is why my friend and I came into this car and dallied so long over our food. It was our intention to remain here until we reached Albany for neither of us wished to make a scene by taking any action against the brute. And now that I am deprived even of the escort of my friend, you can understand how very unpleasant it would be for me to return to the car alone."

As her tale of persecution had caught the secret service man, so the story of the passenger whose too frank admiration annoyed her won the assistance of the headwaiter of the dining car and saying that he would be only too glad to protect her, he went into the parlor car and in due course returned with the coat and her magazines.

"I have taken the liberty of arranging with the parlor car conductor for you to occupy the stateroom in the car just ahead," he said, as he reached the table where the false Countess was sitting. "You will surely be free from annoyance there."

"But I have no money to pay for it," returned the woman half protestingly.

"The conductor told me that your friend was Hiram Jenks of the secret service. I am a new man on this run so that I did not recognize him. Out of courtesy to him, there will be no charge for your occupying the stateroom."

"It is most thoughtful of you, I'm sure," exclaimed the beauty, rising and taking her coat and magazines. "I shall certainly tell Hiram of your kindness and courtesy to me." And again the clever creature brought into play her fascinating smile.

And following the accommodating trainman, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers was soon enjoying the privacy and luxurious comfort of the stateroom.

While the dangerously beautiful and clever creature was whirling over the rails toward her destination, however, the man whom she had so shamefully duped was in torment. So thoroughly had he been convinced that the woman was the Countess she purported to be, because of the letter from the famed banker's wife, that even when he could find no purse and saw the train

disappearing he did not suspect that he was the victim of a trick. Indeed, his mind was too much concerned over the explanation that he should make to the chief in New York.

Having learned that there was no telegraph operator at the station at which he had been left, Jenks sought out a telephone and calling the nearest station from which he could send a despatch, forwarded the message:

"Chief of Secret Service, New York. Was left at Holden. Will follow on next train and explain.

"JENKS."

This done, the luckless agent sought to while away the time as best he could until two o'clock in the morning when the next New York train would pass through the town.

Notwithstanding the success with which she had been able to rid herself of the presence of the secret service agent, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers became obsessed with a sense of impending disaster.

"If it were any man but Digger Barry on my track, I shouldn't care," she exclaimed to herself. "I've hoodwinked the government detectives for years and the best of them abroad, too. But I've always heard this man was more than human, strong as a lion and absolutely without fear. If I can succeed in fooling him this time, I'll take mighty good care to see that he isn't on earth to interfere with my plans when I pull off my next trick—provided the gang in New York don't get him before I arrive, and it does seem as though Jim would have sense enough to put them on his track. But if I'm going to fool Digger, it will be through the Deforrest dame.

"I'll have to play the persecuted act up strong to her, perhaps have one of my boys dress up as a Russian and try to pull off some stunt that will convince her beyond all doubt that my story is the real thing."

And the woman lapsed into contemplation of the best way in which she could work the banker's wife in order to insure protection for herself against the great detective.

"The first thing to do," she finally told herself, "is to find out how strong I am with the Deforrest woman. I know that her husband hasn't told her of the touch I made from him but I don't dare to tackle him again. Though if I don't manage to work him for a few more thousands through his wife, it won't be my fault. Once let me get to their house to visit and I'll have them offering me money, begging me to take it. As soon as I deliver the necklace, I'll have them in my power. If they hesitate about forking over, I'll tell them the stones were smuggled and scare the life out of them by threatening to expose them as buyers of smuggled gems. Oh, they'll offer me money all right, all right!"

No sooner was the decision formed to sound the society leader than the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers set about composing a telegram, finally concocting the appeal for ten thousand dollars on the plea of persecution and the necessity for the money immediately in order to deliver the necklace in time for the ball, ending with the request that the money be telegraphed her at Albany and that an accompanying message be addressed to her at the station there.

Having worded the despatch, the woman left her stateroom at the next stopping place, entered the station and, watching her chance to be sure that none of the train crew saw her paying money after the plea she had made to the headwaiter of the dining car, handed it to the telegraph operator with the request that it be rushed.

When at last the train drew into the station at Albany, the pseudo-countess was clad in her pony coat and almost before the cars had come to a stop she was hurrying to the telegraph office where she found the reply, refusing to advance the money, as the reader already knows.

As she read the brief, cold message, the woman was first furiously angry and then gave way to the same fear that had come to her on the train.

"Something has scared the fool!" she hissed through clenched teeth. "She was so eager to get the necklace in time for that ball she would have sent on the full amount unless she was afraid. Maybe the story of the raid on Jim's offices has got into the papers and she's seen it." Then the Sirstoff suddenly paused in her anger as a thought flashed through her mind so startling that it caused her to lean against the counter of the telegraph office for support.

"Perhaps she has come in contact with Digger Barry, in some way. It's surely a mighty good thing that I wired her. There's something in the wind—and if I hadn't tried to pry the ten thousand from her, I might have walked into a trap.

"But it won't do for me to dally here!"

And accordingly, the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers hurried from the station and entered the first taxicab she came across.

"Drive me over to the station in Troy," she ordered, adding to herself: "I can send a wire to Jim and then catch another train. If Digger is waiting for me in New York, when the Montreal express arrives and I don't get off, he'll think Jim has put me wise and that I've started for some other part of the country—which will enable me to dispose of the necklace to some other of Jim's rich woman stock gamblers without danger of detection."

On the drive to the city across the river, the Sirstoff composed her telegram to the captain of her gang in New York and, in consequence, upon her arrival at the station in Troy she was able to send the message and catch a train that was standing ready to start for the metropolis.

As the operator who received the despatch counted the words, he glanced at the woman waiting to pay the charges, attracted by her wonderful beauty.

"Can't you read it?" she asked, failing to understand his action.

"I think so. 'James Smith, 1411 Maple Avenue, the Bronx, N. Y. Don't go near H. D. Something wrong. Left train at Albany and taking another at Troy. Have all the family at the house when I arrive. Important. M. S.'"

As the operator finished reading the message, the trainmen were shouting "all aboard," and shoving a two dollar bill through the window, Marie ran out to the cars, never waiting for her change.

The departure of the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers from the station in Albany had been in the nick of time!

Indeed, even as she was getting into the taxicab outside the depot, the engine bearing Digger and his assistant steamed into the railroad yard, having made a recordbreaking run from New York.

But the luck that had stood by the remarkable woman in black during the nerve-wracking ordeal of the trip from Montreal was soon to desert her!

Leaping from the engine, the great detective and Toby hastened to the station, coming upon the conductor of the express just as he was reading the order for him to hold his train and voicing his feelings in regard to the indefinite delay in no uncertain words.

"Cheer up, conductor! I'm Mr. Barry," Digger announced, "so you can start your train just as soon as my companion and I get aboard. By the way, is the beautiful woman in black still with you?"

"She was the last I knew, in a stateroom in the last car on the train. Say, I wish you'd tell me what's wrong with her. Jenks almost had a fit about her and then the next thing you know, he's so chummy with her that he sits with her a while and then takes her into the dining car."

"Where she put up some game on him and caused him to be left at Holden," concluded the great detective, to the amazement of the train man. "That woman, conductor, is the cleverest smuggler that ever got out of paying duty!"

"Phew! And here she's worked the headwaiter in the dining car for her food and the parlor car conductor for the stateroom. Say, I want to be with you when you go into her stateroom. I'd like to make her pay for it and the grub. Can you wait a moment while I send one of my brakemen down to tell the engineer that we won't have to wait?"

"Surely," returned Digger and in a few minutes, together with the conductor, he and Toby boarded the train.

But when they opened the door of the stateroom, it was empty—as the reader knows.

"Our bird of paradise has flown—and I can't say I'm surprised," smiled the great detective. "How long is it since you saw her in here?"

"About two hours."

"How many stops have you made in that time?"

"Two."

"At either of which she might have got off. Were any trunks put off?"

"No. We received the message not to set any off—but I tell you there will be a howl from the people who will have to wait for their baggage."

"Oh, they'll get it in the morning. Come on, Toby, we've got our work cut out for us in the baggage car. I only hope my idea is correct that the 'Countess' hid the necklace in her trunk."

"Then you're not going to try to trace the woman?" asked the conductor.

"Not at present. It would be like looking for a needle in a haymow."

"But she's so pretty I should think it would be easy."

"Warned as she evidently has been of the fact that I am on her trail; she will disguise herself the very first opportunity she gets. But I'll catch her sooner or later by watching her pals."

And leaving the stateroom, the great detective and his assistant made their way to the baggage car in which were the trunks of the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers.

As they entered the car, the first thing that met Digger's eyes was a long wooden box which evidently contained a coffin.

Walking over to it, the great detective looked at the card nailed upon it and read the address:

"Henry Smith, 4411 Maple Avenue, The Bronx, New York."

Not long did he linger over it, however, and soon he was busy picking the locks of the trunks pointed out to him by the baggage master as the ones that Jenks had searched.

Rapidly he and Toby lifted out all the articles of the first of the three trunks, laying them in a pile on the floor and then turned the trunk bottom side up and began to tap it to see whether or not it had a false bottom.

But no hidden receptacle did it have and they turned their attention to examining each article taken from it, though with no better success.

The process was repeated with the two other pieces of baggage with no more satisfactory result.

"I reckon the dame must have had the necklace on her person somewhere after all," lamented Toby. "And she'll have plenty good chance to dispose of it before we can locate her, clever as she is, I'm afraid."

Disappointed to think that he had found no false bottoms in any of the trunks, Digger made no response to his assistant's remark, busying himself with putting back the pieces of clothing he had taken out.

But as he picked up a coat, happening to hold it upside down, a man's money book dropped to the floor of the car.

Hastily picking it up, the great detective opened it, only to find that its contents were several cards.

Yet as he read them, he uttered a low whistle.

"What is it?" asked Toby, knowing well that the whistle was his master's method of expressing delighted surprise.

Instead of answering, however, Digger ran to the pine box containing the coffin.

The cards in the money book and the one nailed to the top of the box were identical!

For a moment, the great detective could scarcely believe his eyes, then he turned to the baggage master and asked excitedly:

"Got a chisel, an ax or anything like that?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Open that box."

"Not while I'm in charge of this car, you don't!" retorted the trainman. "You may have the license to search trunks and the like—but you're not going to desecrate a dead body by opening it up!"

"Nonsense, man! I'm willing to wager that box doesn't contain a corpse any more than any of those trunks I have examined!"

"Then what *is* in it?"

"Lead, or stones, probably—and the twenty thousand dollars worth of diamonds that the beauty in black was smuggling into this country!"

In amazement, both Toby and the baggage master heard the words of the great detective. But the former made no move to supply the tools for which Digger had asked.

"Come, man, don't stand there like a gawk, get me a chisel or an ax!" exclaimed Digger, impatiently. "It won't do you any good to hang back for if you refuse, I'll bind you hand and foot!"

As his leader uttered these words, Toby stepped beside the baggage man, ready to seize him.

For a moment the fellow eyed him, then, evidently

realizing that resistance would be useless, he went to his tool box and brought forth an ax.

"Mind, I'm doing this under compulsion," he said as he handed the implement to the great detective. "If any trouble comes of this meddling with a corpse, I want my hands clear."

"I'll take all blame," returned Digger. "But you'll find there won't be any corpse. Indeed, I'll wager that you've been carrying that same pine box, or one like it, rather, about every three months for the last two years!"

With open mouth, the baggage man looked at the great detective.

"That's the truth. I've been on this run for three years and I was remarking to my helper this morning when we were loading that it was funny how we always got a stiff about four times a year. But how in the world did you know it?"

"Because about once in three months, Marie Sirstoff and her band have smuggled diamonds into this country."

All the time he had been talking, Digger had been busy prying open the boards of the pine box and when he had them loosened for some two feet, he shoved them back—disclosing a purple coffin!

With staring eyes and baited breath, Toby and the trainman watched while the great detective, hands trembling, raised the purple lid.

A chunk of lead was the only thing that met their gaze!

"I'm right!" murmured Digger and then sank down on a trunk to compose himself—for the awful possibility of tampering with a dead body had unstrung even his iron nerves.

A pull at his flask, however, soon restored him to his usual calm and he returned to the purple coffin and began his search for the smuggled necklace.

Five pieces of lead he removed and then his hand closed about a little leather case!

Hastily pulling it out, he opened it—and was greeted by a string of sparkling stones!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROUND-UP OF THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS.

In silence, the men gazed from the glittering gems to the casket and back to the gems again.

"No wonder the gang has never been caught before!" exclaimed Toby.

"The dirty devils, they ought to be strung up, every one of them! The idea of playing upon a body's respect for the dead to sneak their tools into this country! Mr. Barry, I hope you send the whole kit and boodle of them up for life!" growled the baggageman.

"I'll certainly do my best to get them the heaviest sentence I can," returned the great detective. "But it will be little satisfaction to send the members of the gang in New York to prison—the person who conceived this shameful method of smuggling, the person I want to get, is Marie Sirstoff, Queen of Diamond Smugglers!"

"Which is easier to talk about than to do," asserted Toby.

"Sure, no woman who would do such a thing can prosper," declared the trainman. "If you're clever enough to find out how they pulled off their tricks, you'll be clever enough to catch the shameless woman, Mr. Barry—and good luck to you with all my heart."

Digger, however, gave no heed to the crude praise of the baggage master. Instead he walked over to the casket and stood looking down into it.

"Hadn't we better send word to the police or the secret service men to have a squad at the station in New York?" asked his assistant. "So long as the diamonds were shipped in such a way there will surely be some of the gang there to claim the—er—box."

"We'll need the police and the agents—but not at the station," returned the famous mystery-solver. "Their presence there would only be a tip to the gang that we had discovered their secret and they would disappear to all points of the compass."

"Then how do you propose to round them up, trail them to the place in the Bronx, or raid it?" inquired Toby.

"A little of both," smiled Digger, grimly. "*I'm going with them in the coffin!*"

For a moment the other two occupants of the car looked at the great detective as though they did not believe their ears.

"Are you crazy?" demanded his assistant. "If you didn't suffocate, you'd be discovered—and instead of you rounding up the smugglers, they would have you at their mercy."

"That's where you are wrong, boy. In the first place, I shall not put on the lid to the purple coffin. In the second, I shall have your revolver, as well as my own. And in the third place, the members of the gang will be so terrified to find that instead of an empty casket they have one with a man in it that a baby could take them prisoners.

"However, I do not propose to rely on myself alone. You will leave the train at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street, Toby, and go directly to the police station where you will have the captain or whoever is in charge, get word to the station in the Bronx to send a detail of ten men to the Maple Avenue address immediately. Say that I wish them to hide somewhere about the grounds until they see the wagon arrive with the box. There'll probably be an automobile or two or carriages. When all are in the house, then they must close in. You, of course, will be there, too. Place the men at the doors. When you hear me yell, break in and come to my assistance as fast as you can.

"On the whole, I think you had better ask for thirty men so that they can be posted at all the doors and windows in order to catch any of the smugglers who try to make a getaway.

"The box containing the necklace, I shall give to you. When you get to the police station, leave it there. Then we'll know that, whatever happens to us, the diamonds will be safe and won't fall into the gang's hands again."

As the baggage master heard this plan unfolded, he gazed at the great detective with open-mouthed amazement and admiration.

"Say, you certainly have your nerve, Mr. Barry," he exclaimed. "I wouldn't take my chance single-handed against those smugglers for a big bit of money and as for putting myself inside that casket, there isn't money enough in the world to hire me to do it!"

"Which reminds me that I must get into it now and see how it fits," remarked Digger, drily.

And removing his coat and shoes, the intrepid detective wriggled his way into the purple coffin.

Thanks to Digger's small size, he was able to lie quite comfortably and, having satisfied himself of that fact, he ordered Toby to replace the boards of the pine box so that he could find out whether or not he could get air enough to keep him alive until he should reach the house of the smugglers.

Fortunately, the boards had not been fitted very tightly together and, as he would be in the open air, the great mystery-solver soon convinced himself that he would experience no suffering during his strange and awful ride.

But not long did he linger in the casket after he found that his desperate plan for the round-up of the gang was feasible.

"You'll want to be putting that lid and those chunks of lead somewhere out of sight," declared the baggage master, glancing at the articles that had been removed.

"That's so. It's a mighty good thing you mentioned it," exclaimed Digger. "If the men who come for the box saw them, they would immediately know something was amiss. Have you any place where we can stow them?"

"Why not put them in one of Marie's trunks?" interposed Toby. "If we shouldn't get her and she should receive her trunks, it would be a grim reminder that we had at least discovered her method of smuggling."

"Good idea," chuckled his master. And without more ado, they put a piece of lead in each trunk and fitted the lid of the purple coffin into the biggest piece of luggage.

Rapidly was the train nearing New York and in order that there might be no slips in his plan, the fearless detective entered his living tomb after giving the box containing the necklace to his assistant, and received the latter's revolver.

With infinite care, Toby nailed up the pine box, finishing just as the train reached the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street station, where he debarked and hastened to carry out his instructions.

* * * * * * * * *

Thanks to the telegram of the Smuggler-queen to her captain to have all the members of the gang at the house in the Bronx, the band were playing right into Digger's hands.

And they were not a cheerful company as they sat in the big living room of the house. The failure to trail Yank and the inability to locate either the great detective or his tall assistant worried them. What little conversation they indulged in was speculation as to the cause of Mrs. Deforrest's attitude and the likelihood of their Queen's finding another purchaser should the society leader decline to take the necklace. But though no mention was made of the subject, their minds were chiefly taken up with wondering what the famous mystery-solver was doing and with laying plans to put him out of the way in order that they might receive the thousand dollars head-money which Arthur had promised them.

At last the time came for the men who were to go to the station to get ready.

Donning expressman's uniforms, Brass Knuckles and Stiletto, in addition to the weapons in the use of which their nicknames showed them to be experts, armed themselves with big bore pistols and set out for the livery stable where they were to get their wagon while Arthur waited a little longer before starting for the station.

Believing that an automobile might prove of great service, he engaged one and rode up to the station in it where he found, to his delight, that the Montreal express was on time.

"Things are coming out all right, after all," he told himself as he paced up and down the waiting room of the station. "I think we've all had a bad case of nerves, caused by the fact that Digger Barry was put on our trail. But we'll fool him! We'll fool him! When Marie gets here she will devise some scheme by which we can get him into our power—and then the Sirstoff band of smugglrs can work without fear."

Having worked himself into such a satisfactory state of mind, the quondam investment broker, who was disguised in his blonde beard and wig, decided that he had time to go to one of the neighboring hotels for a drink—and when he returned to the station he was still more confident that he would be able to capture the great detective.

But even as he strutted proud in his confidence, his fellow smugglers were unloading the casket containing the very man they all so feared!

With becoming solemnity, Arthur supervised the task, waiting until he saw the pine box safely placed in the wagon and his confederates drive away before returning to his car. But no sooner had he entered it than he conceived an idea that proved the undoing of his Queen!

"I believe I'll go over to Jersey and meet Marie," he said to himself. "This car of mine is speedy enough to get us back to the Bronx as soon as the boys reach there with the wagon—provided, of course, that her train is on time and I can quickly learn that by telephoning."

To think was to act with Arthur and bidding his chauffeur wait, he hurried into the station, found an unoccupied telephone booth and soon learned that the express from Troy would arrive on the minute.

Due to the fact that his chauffeur kept to unused streets, the smuggler-captain reached the Jersey shore in time to greet the beautiful woman whom he served with devotion and he was amply rewarded for all the worries and stress of the day by her delight at finding him waiting for her.

"Did the box get through all right?" Marie asked as soon as they had exchanged greetings.

"Yes, and we've got to drive like mad in order to catch up with the boys," he replied.

"Thank goodness. But what do you suppose has happened to Deforrest?"

"I don't know and I don't care," replied Arthur as he tucked the robes about the beautiful woman. "Sylvia has lined up a moneybags from Oklahoma who would give her fifty thousand for the necklace, so we won't worry. And now let's forget the Deforrests and Digger. I want to know about *you*, Marie. Tell me all about your ride down—and then say nice things to me. I'm hungry to hear you talk."

Her companion's good spirits were infectious and soon the Smuggler-queen was gaily narrating the manner in which she had won the kind-hearted Jenks from

a watchful enemy to a friend, the working of the dining car headwaiter for her food and the parlor car conductor for the stateroom.

All too quickly for them, their car overtook the wagon carrying the man who was to turn their joy into anguish and the punishment they so richly deserved and in due course they reached the house in Maple Avenue never even suspecting the eyes that, from behind a convenient stone wall, were watching their approach.

For Toby had carried out his instructions faithfully.

At first, the captain of the police station had doubted his tale but after calling up the headquarters of the secret service, he willingly gave all the aid possible and the thirty policemen had arrived at the home of the smugglers without being discovered.

But anxious were the moments for Toby after the arrival of the wagon and car before the carrying into the house of the box.

Afraid to order the officers to close in too soon, he was equally afraid that the smugglers might discover the trick that had been played upon them and make away with the great detective before he could go to his assistance and the presence of the chauffeur caused him additional alarm.

To his delight, however, he saw Arthur invite him into the house and when he went, and the men drove the wagon under a shed and followed, Toby gave the word to close in.

But the smugglers were in blissful ignorance of the danger that surrounded them.

"All hail to our Queen—and the money the necklace will bring!" exclaimed Arthur, when they were inside. "Bring up the wine, boys, and we'll drink to the health of both!"

"And to the death of Digger Barry!" added Mike the Dip.

"Well said, kiddo!" returned Marie. "The only disappointment I have in coming back is to find that none of you offer me his head!"

"We'll get it for you! We'll get it for you!" chorused the others.

"Here's the wine. Bumpers to our Queen!" shouted Arthur.

"Let's get the necklace and drink to them both!" exclaimed Stiletto.

The suggestion met with instant approval and several of the men ran for implements with which to open the purple coffin.

No difficulty did the great detective have in hearing all that was said and as he heard the proposal to open the box, he clutched his revolvers firmly in each hand, summoning all his strength that he might sit up the instant the boards were loosened.

As the supreme moment in his attempt to round-up the smugglers approached, Digger was calm and collected! He knew that it was life or death for him—and he did not intend to die!

But from the time he heard the men go for tools until they began to pry open the box seemed an enternity to him.

At last, however, he heard the welcome crunch as the implements were pressed under the cover boards.

"Loosen the covers down half way! I put the jewel case in the middle this time!" declared Marie.

"Glasses up!" cried Arthur. "We'll drink when we see the leather box!"

Wild with elation as he heard the command, for he would have the smugglers with their hands in the air, Digger made ready for his coup.

"Stiletto, raise that last board!" ordered Marie.

But before the fellow could obey, the great detective raised himself, literally hurling back the boards!

"Make a move and I'll shoot!" he yelled.

At the sound of the strange voice, the smugglers whirled in its direction—and as they beheld the figure of a man sitting in the purple coffin, death-dealing revolvers firmly clutched in his hands, they gasped in terror!

"It's Digger Barry!" chortled Arthur.

At the name of the great detective, whom one and all of them feared as they feared no one or nothing else in the world, the men and women looked about them for means of escape, evidently calculating their chances of gaining the doors and windows before the man in the casket could stop them with bullets from his pistols.

But while the others were futilely trying to make up their minds what to do, the Queen of Diamond Smugglers again showed her resourcefulness!

The actions of the gang after their surprise had taken only a few seconds.

Caring little for the safety of her pals, for she realized that it was she whom Digger was most eager to get, the Sirstoff, with a lightning movement, dashed the contents of her glass of champagne in the great detective's eyes!

"Now's your time! Fall on the devil and beat him into unconsciousness before he has the chance to get the wine out of his eyes!" she yelled. "Mike, follow me and act as my chauffeur! *I* must get away, no matter what happens to the rest of you! If I am at liberty, I can help you all if you are arrested—if I'm caught, it's jail for all of us for the rest of our lives!"

No urging did the members of the trapped band of smugglers need to make them carry out the orders of their Queen, for though they were willing to give their lives for her, they also valued their freedom.

Accordingly, no sooner had the wine struck the great detective in his face than "Brassknuckle" and "Stiletto" leaped upon him, snatching each a board from the pine box, and began to rain blow after blow upon him.

Partially blinded, his eyes smarting with the sting of the champagne, Digger pumped his revolvers desperately, aiming from his memory of where the members of the gang had been standing.

"Will Toby and the police never come? Has anything happened to interfere with them?" Digger asked himself.

But the attack of the gangsters was too vicious for him to wonder long at the absence of his assistant.

"That's the way, boys!" shouted Marie, encouragingly. "Kick the casket over and bury the devil under it!"

Never in his life had the famous mystery-solver been in such terrible straights, with the odds so overwhelmingly against him.

"If I must die, I'll die game!" he hissed between clenched teeth. And with the strength of despair, he began to lay about him with his now empty revolvers.

But just when it seemed that he could not ward off the blows the two giant smugglers were showering upon him, Digger heard the crashing of doors and then the welcome shouts and tread of many feet.

"Keep your courage up, Digger!" yelled Toby. "We're coming, fifteen strong!"

Instantly the smugglers realized that the tramp of feet and the cries heralded the coming of detectives and police—and in the thought that they had been surrounded, they lost their nerve.

Not so the Queen of the Diamond Smugglers, however!

As the words of Toby rang out above the turmoil, she ran to the nearest window, shattering the glass with a blow of her foot.

"Save yourselves—if you can!" she called.

And bending low her head, the Sirstoff dove through the window!

But instead of leaping to safety, as she had expected, she landed in the strong arms of two policemen, who, having been called to the window by the breaking of the glass, were ready to receive her.

"You're pretty smart—but not smart enough for Digger Barry, my lady!" chuckled one of the officers, as he gripped the arms of the struggling woman while his companion snapped the twisters over her wrists. "Now come in with us and we'll see how the rest of your gang are getting along."

And half carrying, half shoving the Queen of Diamond Smugglers between them, the two policemen forced her into the house and into the room where the coffin lay.

For an instant, the smugglers had sought to fight off the officers. But the sight of the great detective, blood covered and reeling, as he bravely strove to hold his own against the overwhelming odds maddened the policemen, and clubbing their heavy revolvers, they hastily beat the members of the gang into submission and then handcuffed them.

This done, they turned to the great detective—but he lay slumped down in the purple coffin, unconscious.

"By thunder, if you've killed him, you'll all go to the electric chair!" shouted Toby, as he dropped to his knees and forced some brandy from his flask down his master's throat.

The stimulant soon produced an effect and opening his eyes, Digger looked into those of his assistant.

"Did you get them all, the woman too?" he mumbled.

"Every man jack of them!"

"Good. Take me home. Have them held without bail until I can appear against them."

And again the great detective lasped into unconsciousness.

With no gentle hands the smugglers were loaded into the patrol wagon, which had been in hiding after taking the police to the scene of the raid, and taken to jail, where they were held for some ten days while Digger recovered from his terrible beating.

When at last he was able to appear against them, because of the assault upon him with such obvious intent to kill, in addition to their smuggling of the necklace worth twenty thousand dollars, the great detective succeeded in having them sentenced to prison for life.

THE END.

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